



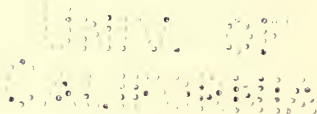
THE OLD ORDER CHANGETH

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THE PASSING OF POWER
FROM THE HOUSE OF LORDS

BY
FRANK DILNOT

"The old order changeth, yielding place to new"



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PREFACE

PERIODS of transition in our political history are appraised more faithfully, their causes and effects discerned more clearly, when looked at from the days of posterity than when nerves are still ajar with the clash of conflict, and vision distorted with a temper not yet cold. But to refrain from chronicling great events when they have passed before the eye simply because succeeding generations may be better able to fit the parts of the story is to make an idol of pedantry, and to do disservice to the State. Perspective is of transcendent value to the historian, but other factors must not be depreciated; and it has to be remembered that the long-distance view always leaves unseen many poignant incidents, always detracts from the pervading force of personality—as potent in the field of politics as on the field of battle. The glitter of the moment may now and again lessen the worth of descriptions, and take the point from judgments; but these defects are more than balanced by the freshness of impressions, and by the liveliness of a picture which in later years must be done in duller colours, and done at second hand.

It was my lot to witness every stage of the proceedings which culminated this summer in the legislation depriving

the Lords of the powers possessed by them for centuries. From the gallery of Parliament I saw the strenuous passage of the Budget of 1909, watched the Lords give it their fatal blow, and was present during the successive crises which developed out of each other from month to month until at last the hand of the Sovereign himself was invoked against the outstanding Peers. A connected and continuous story of the conflict from start to finish seems to me a work which may possess a value, as well as an interest, for all who have a feeling for history.

The political happenings of the two years from 1909 to 1911 were not only history but drama. From beginning to end events were linked together, and the many quick revealments, the influence of strong temperaments, the possibilities of the approaching finale, all helped to give the situation a fascination which can be but faintly reflected in written words. Some day perhaps more of the drama will be made known to the world: the private rehearsals, the secret disappointments and triumphs of the authors. These things will have an interest of their own. My task it is to present the play as it was given before the footlights, with its fluctuating attractions, its excitements, its contending ideals, its bitterness, its chivalries.

To tell a plain tale plainly has been my aim. And in the telling of it I have endeavoured to give honour where honour is due, to abstain from blame where motives are doubtful, to explain equitably rival objects and ideas, and to be as just to the individual leaders as to the principles they advocate. I have watched men

battling during years for and against a purpose which, now that it is achieved, must remain a permanent mark in English history. These men I have portrayed as I have seen them. The story that links them is indivisible from themselves, and they have the knowledge, if not the satisfaction, that be they great men or lesser men Fate has tossed them to the surface amid events which will find their place in the progressive record of man's government of man.

F. D.

LONDON,

September, 1911.

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THE OLD ORDER CHANGETH

CHAPTER I

THE GATHERING OF THE STORM

AT half-past two on the afternoon of Thursday, April 29th; 1909, Mr. Lloyd George walked briskly across New Palace Yard to the members' entrance of the House of Commons; carrying in his hand a small red despatch-box which contained the outline of a scheme destined to wreck the powers of the House of Lords and to open a new era in British politics.

The actual beginnings of great movements have always a fascination in after times, and there is interest in the conjecture as to whether Mr. Lloyd George when walking towards the policemen guarding the way into the House had a vision of the future's changes to result from that afternoon's work. Perhaps he did, for he is a Celt, with a Celtic intuition. He must certainly have had an expectation of some of these changes, for as Chancellor of the Exchequer he was about to introduce his first Budget with its far-reaching and novel provisions. If in addition he had a glimmering of what was to be the

secondary effect of that Budget, he saw things which no practical politician of that time would have believed to be possible happenings within a period of ordinary human outlook. The enthusiastic reformer, however, takes audacious glimpses into futurity, and there may have been in Mr. Lloyd George's mind that day, thoughts, fears and ambitions, which, if they had found expression, would then have been regarded as tremendous and outrageous. From his appearance no one would have guessed that he harboured a sinister design against one of the component parts of the constitution. Knowingly or unknowingly, he was going into the House of Commons to make history, but there seemed no great weight on his mind on that spring afternoon as he made his way across Palace Yard. With him was his close political companion and personal friend, Mr. Winston Churchill. They entered by the big gateway at the corner nearest to Whitehall, and they passed over to the House in conversation together. Mr. Churchill seemed rather laden with the seriousness of the occasion, but there was no sign of depression about Mr. Lloyd George. He listened to his friend's remarks with a characteristic air of vivacity and fighting good humour, and at the archway leading to the members' entrance he smiled recognition to a constable who had raised his hand in salute. Then he and his friend passed inside.

Round at another door there were entering members of the House of Lords on their way up to their special gallery to hear the introduction of a Budget which they felt beforehand would have evil consequences for the country. They little knew that whatever its direct consequences it was fated ultimately to strike a deadly

blow at their own privileges—privileges till then regarded by the State as theirs by inalienable right.

In order to appreciate properly the Budget day of 1909 it is necessary to have in mind the development of events which led up to it. For nearly twenty years the Liberal party had been fighting with adversity. The Unionists had the upper hand practically from the time that Lord Salisbury took office in 1886 until Mr. Balfour resigned at the end of 1905. True there was a Liberal Ministry in power for the three years from 1892 to 1895, but they were weak Liberal years. A slender majority of forty was all that was available, and although Mr. Gladstone held the Government in being until his retirement in 1894, it was little more than a year later that an adverse vote in the House of Commons brought the Parliament to an end. There was a general election, Liberals were overwhelmed throughout the country, and the Unionists came into power with a majority of 152. The ensuing ten years was a period of dissension and disaster for what may be called official Liberalism. In a hopeless minority in the House of Commons, the Liberals developed serious sectional differences. The trouble in South Africa leading to war in 1899 accentuated those differences and set up a furious strife between the staid traditional Liberal of Whig tendencies and the advanced Radical with notions regarded as extreme, impractical, and, so far as the war was concerned, unpatriotic. In 1900, during the South African contest, another general election carried in the Unionists again on a wave of war feeling by a majority of 134. Quarrels between leading Liberals grew more acute than ever. Lord Rosebery who had succeeded Mr. Gladstone in the chieftainship of the party,

was at the head of one section, and Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman was at the head of the other. The divided counsels which distracted Liberalism at this time may be gauged from the fact that Lord Rosebery in 1901 publicly swept away many cherished Liberal projects, including the alliance with the Irish members, and declared for the policy of the "clean slate," and that a month or two later Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman declared in public, "I am no believer in the 'clean slate.'" The Liberal League with strong imperialist tendencies was formed, with Lord Rosebery as its President, and with Sir Edward Grey and Mr. Asquith among its members, in order to save the Liberal party in general from the condemnatory epithet "pro-Boer." But although the Liberal Leaguers were the popular body, and although Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman and his followers were abused to a degree far beyond ordinary party invective, it was the latter who had a hold on the Liberal organisation, and who eventually brought the Liberals out of the wilderness. Their success was by no means the result of their own unaided genius, but undoubtedly something was due to personality. In the first place, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, though no orator, had the qualities of a tenacious Scot, and while the most genial of men, was at the same time shrewd; far-seeing, and unwavering. Alone, however, he could have done little, but he was backed by all that was strongest in the unofficial Liberalism of the House of Commons. It may be mentioned here that among the most noticeable of his supporters was Mr. Lloyd George, who in recent years had been springing into prominence as a young Welsh member of keen wit and

vitriolic speech. But no Parliamentary assistance from individual followers, however enthusiastic or able, would have lifted Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman to power in the face of nominal friends on the one hand and actual foes on the other, without the help of forces deep-rooted and widespread. While the official Liberal leaders were quarrelling with each other new influences, new thoughts, new ambitions, were making themselves felt throughout the community. The patriotic fervour of the war time allowed little chance of development, but when the war was ended they soon began to find expression. The new impulse received substantial adventitious aid from what may be called one of the traits of political human nature. There had been something like fifteen or sixteen years of Conservative domination in the government of the country, and the "swing of the pendulum" tendency was making itself observable even among Unionists. In politics, as in other departments of life, the long uninterrupted excellencies of one's friends sometimes approach the verge of wearisomeness, and there springs up an irrational desire to experience for a time the activities of enemies. Moreover, some of the adherents of a party in power for any length of time become disappointed, others disgusted, and others again genuinely hostile. All Governments experience something of the kind, but in the years between 1900 and 1905 many other influences were also at work to weaken the hold of the Government on the country, and they were extraordinary influences.

Another generation had come into being since the time when Gladstone, the great Liberal leader, had held sway. With him had departed effective Liberalism.

Since his time boys had grown to the pride of manhood, school children had become husbands and wives, and tens of thousands unborn when he laid down the reins of office were now adult voters in town and village. Practically all of the young electors had gone through the most impressionable years of their life while one party and one party alone ruled the State. The continued ascendancy of an unchanged set of governors over such a long period was in itself sufficient to increase into a lasting sense of injury what might in some cases have been a passing discontent. An element of curiosity with regard to the Liberals, and an English desire to play the game fairly, formed parts of the new impulse that was abroad. More potent than all these forces was the remaining one. The unrest of fervid young politicians on the progressive side was being manifested in unexpected places. The radius of elementary education had been enlarged by another generation; and in addition to this the increased opportunities for education among the poorer classes were producing the effect, for good or evil, that a deeper and more extensive interest was being taken in politics by the great bulk of the working folk of the country. There was a threatening note of practicalness in the chorus of demand for improved social conditions for the more unfortunate of our people. "Equality of opportunity" was beginning to be demanded by young men whose fathers would have been outraged at "socialistic" ideas.

Evils which for a century have called forth the spasmodic and largely ineffective protests of individuals, writers and preachers, as well as politicians, began not merely to stir the sympathies, but to rouse the determination of a great proportion of the community. Among the

Conservatives as well as in the Progressive forces one found traces of the prevalent spirit, and the more active-minded and ambitious of the younger men entered upon a struggle with regard to the old shibboleths. To some extent they shared the impatience and indignation of the fiery spirits on the other side at the cautiousness with which urgent political problems were approached. It may be argued that these feelings showed them to be no true Conservatives at all; be that as it may, the fact remains that one or two men, the rising hopes of the party, notably Mr. Winston Churchill and Major Seely, presently crossed the floor and joined Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman. An indication of the new feeling in the country at this time is shown by the effective way in which the Labour leaders were organising themselves and the manual workers in various constituencies, and making ready for the appeal to the country when it should come. Labour men, including the Socialists and Trade Unionists, represented only the advance guard of what for want of a better term may be called the New Liberalism, which was already constituting itself a factor in our national life.

This New Liberalism which was for thorough measures, which would brook no hesitancy or timidity on the part of its leaders, took Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman as its chief. Lord Rosebery left the fighting line altogether. Enthusiasm grew. The country was at one of those phases in political history when inspiration comes from the ranks instead of from the commanders, a fact which, while it sometimes brings a touch of danger, is productive of virility and strength. By the time 1905 was reached the country was in a state of expectancy.

Large sections of the public had, or claimed to have, striking grievances which called loudly for redress. Apart from the rousing of the social conscience with regard to the sufferings of the more or less helpless poor, the silent endurance of underpaid women workers and the hunger of little children sent foodless to school, there were insistent strident demands from powerful divisions of the community for legislation in regard to matters particularly affecting themselves. Nonconformists, who all over the country had been going to prison rather than pay rates demanded from them under an Act passed by Mr. Balfour, called almost fiercely for a new adjustment of the education system; Irish Nationalists, in the valley of non-achievement since the great split in the Liberal party decades before, were once more raising high the banner of Home Rule; Scotsmen were wanting a new system of land tenure north of the Tweed; Welshmen were eager for the disestablishment of the Church in Wales. A hundred influences were working for the new era, and for a time, at any rate, the country was in revolt against the Conservative régime.

Mr. Balfour resigned at the end of 1905. At the beginning of 1906 there was a general election. The Conservatives were beaten to an extent unknown in Parliamentary history. No politician who lived through that election will ever forget it. Mr. Balfour was turned out of his seat at East Manchester by a majority of nearly two thousand votes, safe Conservative seats all over the country passed to the enemy, and London, regarded as the home and centre of Conservatism, returned forty-two Liberal and Labour members against nineteen Conservatives. Practically the whole of Lancashire was

captured, and Conservative strongholds were seized in the south and west. The general nature of the change was its characteristic feature. From various causes the agricultural labourer in East Anglia joined with the miners in the north, the farmers in Wales, and the peasants in Ireland, to put the Conservatives out of power and to return a new set of governors to Westminster. The total figures tell very plainly what happened at the election. Whereas in 1900 the Unionists possessed a majority of 124 (reduced in subsequent years by elections and desertions), the Liberals, with their Labour and Nationalist allies returned in 1906 with a force of 514 against 156 Unionists. The exhilaration among the diverse elements of the Liberal army may be imagined. At last was the day of salvation. Idealists, doctrinaires, practical men, Liberals of the old school, young enthusiasts; all were united in joyous exaltation. Dreams of a generation before were to come true. After twenty years' tribulation, overwhelming power had been granted to Liberals, granted them for the purpose of sweeping away old privilege, of trampling down the barriers to free citizenship, of opening a pleasanter way for the poor and suffering—even at the cost of the rich and highly placed.

The spirit of the New Liberalism was the driving force of the great majority, and any attempt to revive the methods of moderate Liberals of bygone times would have been crushed in a movement which would have enveloped those who proposed it. The excited patriotic feeling engendered by the war five years before was gone; Lord Rosebery had passed from public attention, the Liberal League was practically forgotten. In these circumstances never was Scottish shrewdness better

exemplified than by the action of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman. Realising that the transformation in the spirit of his following, with its new forceful impatience, was to provide the motive power for achievement, he realised also that it was necessary to introduce an element of stability, to use energy and political talent which had been previously exercised in other directions, and which might even now be turned against him unless he found a place for it and began at once to inspire it with the new ideas. Thus it was that Mr. Asquith, the cleverest, though perhaps not the most enthusiastic of the Rosebery section, was made into Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman's first lieutenant as Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Haldane was given the post of Secretary for War, Sir Edward Grey was made Foreign Secretary. Looking far ahead, and knowing full well that the life-blood of his movement was in the fresh-found energy, insistence, and uncompromising verve which animated the new majority, Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman was pretty certain that statesmen of the understanding and the calibre of the three men just mentioned would before long feel its influence and become impregnated with its vigour. Desiring the strength of the best amalgam, the Liberal Prime Minister was fully aware of where Liberal effectiveness would have to be found in the future, and he brought in Mr. Lloyd George as President of the Board of Trade, Mr. John Burns as President of the Local Government Board, Mr. Winston Churchill as Under Secretary for the Colonies. New Liberalism was delighted. Mr. John Burns was the first working man to be admitted to a British Cabinet; Mr. Lloyd George was the most effective Radical fighter in the House of Commons, Mr. Winston

Churchill, the brilliant son of Lord Randolph Churchill, had forsaken Conservative principles and had already been indicated by political prophets as the future Liberal Prime Minister. Thus began in January, 1906, the Campbell-Bannerman administration. The 500 supporters of it went down to Westminster hot-foot and panting for legislation. They saw few difficulties. The great Liberal age had begun.

Disillusionment came to the new and eager House of Commons within a year, and before the first session was over the impetuous New Liberalism had received a setback. The Government had started early on the programme which they believed the spirit in the country called for, and they went forward under the apparent impression that whatever technical power there was in other parts of the constitution to resist changes, that power would not be exercised in face of the obvious desires of the electors. This was a miscalculation. The old Conservatism, recovering itself after the staggering events of the 1906 election, began to range its forces and called the House of Lords into action. About 500 of the 600 members of the Upper Chamber were Conservatives, and as the consent of the Lords was necessary to the passage of any legislation, the situation which arose does not require very much explaining. It is true that various Liberal measures were passed by the Lords, generally with some alteration small or extensive—but they made a resolute stand against those great Liberal bills of a highly controversial character embodying some part of the spirit of the New Liberalism. The effectiveness with which they took action came almost as a shock to the progressive army in the Commons.

The Government began in 1906 with a comprehensive Education Bill which endeavoured to set up the principle of popular control of all elementary schools with no religious tests for teachers. Principally on the plea that it treated unfairly the rights of the voluntary schools and those connected with them, and undermined the arrangements for teaching definite religious beliefs, the Lords made drastic alterations in the measure—alterations which eventually led to its abandonment. Much exasperation was roused and a chorus of threats went up. The Conservatives claimed that the Lords were representing the real opinion of the country. Liberals scoffed. Their resentment was increased by the humiliation of their helplessness. Confident in the justice of their opinions the Lords went on their way. In the same year they threw out without detailed discussion the Plural Voting Bill, which provided that no man should have more than one vote. It was in June, 1907, that the Government made its first manifestation against the Lords by a resolution proposed by Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman. This is the wording of it as submitted to the Commons by the Prime Minister :—

“That in order to give effect to the will of the people as expressed by their elected representatives it is necessary that the power of the other House to alter or reject bills passed by this House should be so restricted by law as to secure that within the limits of a single Parliament the final decisions of the Commons shall prevail.”

The majority for the Prime Minister enabled him to pass his resolution quite easily. His speech on the occasion is notable for the fact that he suggested a definite plan for dealing with the difficulty between

the two Houses. His plan was that if a bill were sent up to the Lords and an agreement on it found impossible between the two Houses, a conference representing both Chambers should deliberate privately in order to find if possible a common measure of agreement. If the conference proved unproductive the bill; with or without modifications, might be re-introduced by the Government after a period of not less than six months, and if, when the bill went up to the Lords there was still a difference of opinion between the two Houses, a conference might again be summoned. If this second conference were unsuccessful the bill might again be passed swiftly through all its stages in the House of Commons in the form last agreed to and sent to the other House "with an intimation that unless passed in that form it would be passed over their heads." Even then there might be another conference and an endeavour to agree before the final step was taken.

The discussion which took place in reference to the resolution gave opportunity to the New Liberals for expression of their feelings towards the Lords, but at that time it apparently served no other object, because the Upper Chamber went on unconcernedly doing what it conceived to be its duty in checking rash and hazardous legislation. Two Scottish bills were killed by them, one for the compulsory valuation of the capital value of all land in Scotland, and the other for the institution of certain methods for the provision of small holdings in the same country. In 1908 the Government brought in the Licensing Bill, a piece of projected legislation designed to recover for the State the monopoly value of licences, to abolish under a system of compensation 30,000 public

houses throughout the country, and to effect other changes which it was urged would promote temperance. There were prolonged and heated Commons debates, which were made notable by the masterly way in which Mr. Asquith steered the bill through. The measure went up to the Lords, and they, declaring that it treated the licensed trade unjustly and did not make for temperance, immediately threw it out.

At the end of 1908 it was generally recognised that no big controversial measure inspired by the New Liberalism would pass with its principles preserved through the House of Lords. The 514 members of the Commons were unable to make headway against the minority of 156 because of the allies of the latter in the Upper Chamber. Liberal enthusiasts shook with indignation. Land reformers who were demanding that landowners should bear more of the burden of the State for the relief of other classes, the Nationalists who had never ceased to clamour for Home Rule, the Welshmen who wanted disestablishment of the Church over their borders—these and other sections of the New Liberals saw that their chances were gone unless some striking alteration were made in legislative procedure, unless some strong man arose, careless of precedent. A score of varying forces acting and reacting upon each other developed the political situation, and presently the coalition of Liberals, fervid in their hopes as well as in their fears, began to see a glimmer of light ahead. Personal readjustments in the Cabinet had altered the outlook considerably.

It will be for the ultimate historian to say what was the full effect on the fortunes of the nation of the death of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman in April, 1908. The political

importance of the events which followed his death cannot be overrated. Mr. Asquith, whose democratic sympathies had been gathering strength, and who (in spite of a touch of suspicion in the breasts of extreme enthusiasts) had won the admiration and respect of the Liberal forces generally, was called to power as Prime Minister. This left vacant the second post in the Cabinet, namely that of the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and the country at this time being very appreciative of the dexterous handling of Board of Trade problems by Mr. Lloyd George, it was suggested here, there, and everywhere, that on him should fall the choice. True he was a young politician, as politicians go, was bitter in debate, and sometimes reckless as well as brilliant, and these facts caused a few to shake their heads. Nevertheless, Mr. Lloyd George was appointed. It was an appointment which was to be big in history. Now it is a trite thing to say that Mr. Lloyd George has a striking personality, but at that time, in spite of his successes, he was not nearly so well known as he was destined to be later, and it would have seemed an exaggeration to have stated then that the new Chancellor of the Exchequer was to become the ruling personal influence in the political position. But it was the fact, though there was no outward sign at first. For some time he conducted the routine business of his office with Parliamentary politeness and a marked unobtrusiveness. It is apparent now, however, that he realised the situation, saw the plight of the Liberal hosts, and put before himself the task of deliverance. As for the New Liberals they knew the fighting qualities of Mr. Lloyd George, and were openly exultant at his high position, and the chances which would be opened up to him.

It was in these circumstances and in the traditional Exchequer secrecy that Mr. Lloyd George set to work to prepare his first Budget, the Budget which would have to be explained to the House of Commons in the spring of 1909. It was to be a Budget to frustrate the Lords. Neither Liberals nor Conservatives were aware of the extent of his plans, though the former were waiting with hopefulness and the latter with some forebodings. For many years the Peers had not interfered in any way with the financial legislation of the Commons, and Mr. Lloyd George, realising this, proceeded to include in his Budget financial provisions which in effect introduced many ideas of the New Liberalism in the form of proposals making profound changes in the demands on the propertied classes. The Budget, as he planned it, was an omnibus bill, carrying projects which submitted separately would have been almost ignominiously thrown back by the House of Lords. It was a move at once daring and audacious.

With his secrets contained in his red despatch-box Mr. Lloyd George crossed New Palace Yard on Budget Day, 1909, with the brisk walk and alert mien of a man who is going in to an agreeable task long looked forward to.

CHAPTER II

MR. LLOYD GEORGE

No description of the change in our constitution would be complete without some attempt to sketch the character and personality of Mr. Lloyd George, the man who was so largely responsible for it. Regarded by the Conservatives in his Opposition days as a venomous debater, Mr. Lloyd George came to be looked upon in his period of office as a demagogue who used scarifying language without scruple and without stint, and who was prepared to back up unjustifiable words with unjustifiable actions. The Liberals, on the other hand, rallied round him joyously inspired by his force and courage, glorying in the fighting idealist who was to carry them to victory. Two other general facts may be mentioned: one was the storm of abuse and sneers from his lesser known opponents and from the Conservative Press; and the second the amicable relations which existed between him and his chief opponents in the House of Commons.

David Lloyd George was born on January 17th, 1863, at Manchester, where his father was in charge of an elementary school. The Georges came from yeoman stock in Pembrokeshire, and Mr. Lloyd George's father,

early moved by a love of study, left the rural homestead to obtain opportunities of self-culture in the cities, and the sequel of many struggles was that he found himself in Manchester. It was very soon after his son David was born that William George broke down under the strain of ill health and went back once more to country life in a small farm near the town of Haverford-west.

Two happy years were spent here, and then William George was stricken down by pneumonia and died after a few days' illness. He left a widow and two little children quite unprovided for. Mrs. George, however, was fortunate in possessing a bachelor brother of remarkable character who lived in Carnarvonshire, and he, on hearing of his sister's plight, set out at once for Pembrokeshire to give aid and protection to his widowed sister and her children. There was a sale at the little farm, and the future Chancellor of the Exchequer, not yet three years old, saw the neighbours come in and heard them bid for various things in the home.

Richard Lloyd took his sister and her children back to Llanystumdwy, a picturesque little Carnarvon village, and made himself their bulwark through times of great domestic anxiety. In later years, Mr. Lloyd George told of that fight with life. "My mother," he said, "had to make a hard struggle to bring up her children, but she never complained and never spoke of her struggles. It was not until long after that we were able to appreciate how fine had been her spirit in the hard task of bringing up her fatherless children. Our bread was home-made. We scarcely ever ate fresh meat, and I remember that our greatest luxury was half an egg for each child on Sunday

mornings." The remembrance of those hard times; the ever poignant memories of his mother's silent devotion in the days of poverty have undoubtedly had their effect on Mr. Lloyd George's later life; and the passionate intensity with which he has flung himself into battle on behalf of the poorer section of the community has been at least partly due to his first-hand knowledge of the hardships of the poor, and their day-to-day heroism in commonplace things.

David Lloyd George grew up as a village lad, early distinguishing himself in village mischief. From the first he was audacious. His entry into public life was made when as a child he fomented and led a rebellion in the parish church. The pupils of the village school had to attend church twice a year to say the Creed, and young David heard his uncle, a stern nonconformist, protest against the practice of marching nonconformist children to an Anglican church. The boy gathered his school companions and pointed out to them the obnoxiousness of what they were required to do, and the result was, that when in the church the vicar requested the children to repeat the Creed there came from them not a syllable. Though eventually the weaker ones gave in, and though young David was punished for his revolt, he nevertheless scored a victory, for the children were not again marched to the church to repeat the Creed.

The manifest cleverness of the boy led to anxious considerations on the part of his mother and uncle as to how he should earn his living. Richard Lloyd was a shoemaker, and by years of rigid economy had saved a few hundreds of pounds as provision for himself in his old

age. There was something really noble, therefore, in his determination to use this money for the education of his clever nephew. But he did more than that. Forgetful of his years, the old shoemaker set himself to learn French and the elements of law so as to teach the boy—for by now it had been decided to give him a start in life as a solicitor. Richard Lloyd's labours and self-denial met with their reward in the quick assimilation of learning by David. At fourteen the latter had passed the law preliminary examination; at sixteen he was articled to solicitors in the town of Porthmadog; and it was in 1884, when twenty-one years old, that David Lloyd George passed the final examination to qualify as a solicitor. The attendant expenses exhausted the little money at his command, and he had not left in his possession even the three guineas necessary to buy the robes without which he could not practise in the courts. Eventually he obtained some office work which secured him enough money to equip him.

Manhood had brought to fruition the qualities seen early in the boy, and Lloyd George, poor and without influence, was fated soon to leap to public notice. In a village at the foot of Snowdon a quarryman on his death-bed told to his friends his wish to be buried in the grave of his little girl who had died some years before, and on his death the friends went to the rector, gave what notice was demanded, and the grave was opened. On the day before the funeral, the rector was handed a formal intimation that his services would not be required, because nonconformist ministrations would mark the burial. In a sudden flame of resentment the rector had the grave closed up; and selected for the burying-place of the old quarryman a

corner of the churchyard usually set apart for suicides. The relatives were raging. They went for advice to Lloyd George, the young solicitor, and they soon found out that they had gone to the right man. He threw himself into the affair with ardour, investigated local conditions, studied precedent, finally discovered that the rector had no legal right to treat the burial-ground as absolute church property, and advised the villagers to go in a body and demand admittance as a right. "If the rector refuses to open the gates," he said, "break down the wall which your subscriptions have built, force your way into the churchyard, re-open the grave, and bury the old man by his daughter." The advice was followed, and it is easy to picture the scene in that little graveyard on the day that the rebellious Welsh villagers took the law in their own hands. A legal action followed, and a passionate speech by Lloyd George secured the verdict of the jury. The county court judge, however, put aside the decision on a point of law, and found for the rector. The young solicitor took the matter to the high court, and there the lord chief justice and another judge crushed the decision of the court below and justified the villagers in their action. From that time Lloyd George became a public man.

Mr. Lloyd George's devotion to his country, his passion against oppression by privilege, his dare-devilry and his appealing eloquence, led him with rapidly succeeding steps to the high appreciation of his countrymen. Within five years he was known throughout Wales. Parliament was the inevitable destination for such a man. In 1890, at the age of 27, he fought the Carnarvon Boroughs against Mr. Ellis Nanney, the squire of the parish in which he spent his boyhood. The squire was beaten. On

April 17th; 1890, the Budget Day of the year; Mr. Lloyd George first took his seat in the House of Commons.

From the outset he was fascinated by the House; and as a preliminary to distinction therein; set himself to conquer all its forms and usages. He soon began to make his mark—as much by his independence as by the probing quality of his speeches, and he was quickly recognised as a keen and able parliamentarian. Many times he distinguished himself in the country and in the House, earning eulogies; making bitter enemies, but always by his personality and power forcing himself in the forefront. The position he attained is well set forth by his biographer; Mr. Hugh Edwards. “Within less than two years after his advent to Parliament as an unknown stripling he found himself installed as the acknowledged leader of the Welsh nation; and north and south men flocked round his standard with as eager and as ardent a devotion as their forbears had rallied for the patriotic campaigns of Llewelyn and Glyndwr.”

Mr. Lloyd George who had manifested a delight in fighting unequalled by any living politician; became an ardent pro-Boer at the time of the South African war; and facing great unpopularity, while he alienated many old friends, scorchingly denounced the war and nearly everything connected with it. There was real detestation of him in the hearts of a great majority of the patriotic party. But he was the kind of man to glory in an unpopularity arising from the springs of conscience. The election of 1900 would, it was believed, be disastrous to Mr. Lloyd George, but his faithful constituents at Carnarvon returned him with an increased majority. There were wild, joyous scenes on that election night. “While

England and Scotland are drunk with blood," cried the young Welsh orator, "the brain of Wales remains clear; and she advances with steady step on the road to progress and liberty."

He went back to a House of Commons still overwhelmingly Conservative, inspired by his victory, strengthened by the confidence that comes from the knowledge of personal power. In the old days he had recklessly attacked Mr. Gladstone, when he considered it necessary; and now once more he made a set at the strongest man in Parliament, namely, Mr. Joseph Chamberlain. There was no one else in the House who could do it. The deadly power of Mr. Chamberlain, his swift, cruel phrases, his sardonic lucidity, the almost tigerish effectiveness with which he dealt with those who had the temerity to attack him, gave him a supremacy in the House which no one had had the power to challenge. Mr. Lloyd George went to the fray with much exhilaration. He laid himself out to strike at the great man. He went further, he used Mr. Chamberlain's own weapons. Mr. Chamberlain hit back as he alone knew how. He hit back tremendously. But Mr. Lloyd George did not flinch under punishment; and all the time he was thrusting as well as parrying. In season and out of season he rained hissing speeches on Mr. Chamberlain's head. It is related how the great Birmingham statesman, impervious to attack from all others, would sometimes wince under the words of the young politician, and how on one occasion he sprang to his feet to ask to be allowed second speech in reply to some vengeful assertion. That was the first time members on leaving the chamber referred to Mr. Lloyd George as a match for Mr. Chamberlain. With characteristic dash,

indeed with something like effrontery; Mr. Lloyd George was not content to battle with Mr. Chamberlain in the Commons; he must needs go down to Birmingham, the domain of Mr. Chamberlain, and the place of all others where he was most idolised. The people of Birmingham rose in their thousands to deal with the impudent intruder. Great throngs were massed in the neighbourhood of the hall where Mr. Lloyd George was to speak, and such was the uproar that when he rose not a word that he said could be heard, even by the reporters close to him. The hall was assailed by the maddened mob, and in the ensuing riot many people were injured and one life was lost. The chief constable, realising that Mr. Lloyd George was in much physical danger, took him to a side room, dressed him in a policeman's uniform, and eventually got him away between policemen.

The country was in an extremely excited state at this time, and the young Welsh member was the object of a torrent of ridicule, jeers, and violent condemnations. It was certainly his most unpopular period. Nevertheless, the obstinate qualities he displayed were part and parcel of the personality which before so very long was to lift him to high office.

The passage of any man from the private benches in the House of Commons to the line of ministers who flank the Mace is always a piquant episode. The promoted member may be young or middle-aged, may have been a silent and devoted worker for the government, or may have been a nominal supporter whose brilliant attacks were far more noticeable than his help, but in any case the House watches his transference to the seat of authority with something like parental curiosity. Every one looks

keenly for the psychological effect of the change. Will the young minister's brilliance fade? Will he sink into modest obscurity in the knowledge of his companionship with established leaders, or will he, clothed with a little brief authority, disperse the respect of his opponents and the admiration of his friends by bumptious over-confidence? Every man of personality who goes up to the front bench presents a riddle, a riddle the more interesting because it is sure to be solved before very long. Conceive the eager curiosity which was roused when Mr. Lloyd George was taken from a seat below the gangway and placed on the Treasury Bench as President of the Board of Trade. A dashing fighter, tireless in battle, inspired by Celtic passion, of lightning wit, reckless of consequences to friends or foes on matters of principle—this was the man to be placed in charge of the great commercial department of the State. No wonder that a good many Liberals shrugged their shoulders. The consequences to the Board of Trade could not fail to be serious, said some. To place a wild demagogue to control those functions connected with the trade and business of the country which came within State control was an experiment which might be very interesting, but it had its serious perils. The people who held these opinions, however, had not been possessed of the opportunities of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman for close observation of Mr. Lloyd George's character and capacity, and it pretty soon became apparent that the fiery Welshman had in him a shrewdness and adaptability which do not always go with political enthusiasm. In short, the House of Commons had the spectacle of a thorough transformation. Mr. Lloyd George, the implacable debater, had become Mr. Lloyd

George the courteous, unobtrusive minister. He answered questions at the Table of the House with a dove-like mildness, and he went out of his way to avoid stirring any one to anger. He strove to supply all the information which pertinacious opponents desired, and criticism he met with the desire to concede and to conciliate. Meanwhile, he was silently learning his new business and devoting long laborious days to acquiring the knowledge of the work of the Board of Trade. He brought to the task a fresh and unconventional mind, but a mind which had no inclination to scoff at long-established practices with a continuing value.

Presently he essayed legislation: general approval met his Patent and Designs Act, framed to compel manufacturers holding British patents to make their goods here instead of abroad; and his Merchant Shipping Act, which gave British sailors better food and healthier conditions of life.

Strange as it may seem, the fire-eater built up a reputation as a legislator and as an administrator who could carry through technical and highly important projects of consequence to the commercial prosperity of the country. He undertook the reorganisation of the port of London, a task involving the acquisition of millions of pounds' worth of property and the setting up of a public authority which would control the docks and wharves, build new ones where necessary, improve the bed of the Thames, and generally to take steps to bring order out of something like chaos, and to ensure that, generations ahead, London should still be the first port of the world. The mere statement that the Port of London Bill passed successfully through both Houses of

Parliament; conveys in a bald phrase an achievement which was a really remarkable one. Perhaps, however; Mr. Lloyd George's greatest success at the Board of Trade was not in the shape of legislation at all. It was he who, in a burst of strenuous diplomacy, brought about the settlement of the dispute between railway men and railway masters, and by it averted a strike which could not have failed to have killed for a time a great part of our commerce, and to have put millions of the public back to the days when travelling by the high-road was the only means of locomotion. The newspapers forgot Mr. Lloyd George's pro-Boer days; and all of them chanted his praises. He was held as a discovery. As a matter of fact, his success was not wonderful to those who knew the man, for he was simply directing to business problems the native ardour and tenacity which had made him so formidable a fighter in other circumstances. In some respects, the episode of the railway dispute was the turning point in the public estimation of Mr. Lloyd George; by friends and foes he was now regarded as a man who would have seriously to be reckoned with in the public life of the country in the future.

Over and over again the President of the Board of Trade shook the walls of officialdom; and, where they stood in the way of accomplishment, he pulled them down with a sort of cheery force. He brought to bear an unconventional efficiency which was refreshing to behold; but was not always so pleasant to those who came in contact with it. He turned what had been considered the Celtic disability of fervour into a motive force for public business, and he displayed a stimulating disregard of usage where usage was only the buttress of official

dignity. There was a great railway disaster at Shrewsbury, where many were killed and injured. I went down in a journalistic capacity to describe that catastrophe, and to watch the investigations as to its cause, and I expected to find there, as usual, the Board of Trade inspector, who, on these occasions, is always sent direct to the scene. To my surprise, I found the President of the Board of Trade himself. Disregarding precedent, Mr. Lloyd George had come down with the Inspector to examine things with his own eyes, his object being to learn what precautions, if any, could be instituted to prevent such tragic happenings in the future. I saw him stepping quickly over the line, threading his way through the wreckage, ascertaining the opinions of railway men, and losing no chance to get a thorough grip of the facts. The official inquiry into such accidents is usually held privately, but Mr. Lloyd George decided quickly that on this occasion it should be public, because he felt that all the country was shocked at the disaster. On the way down to the Raven hotel, where the inquiry was to be held, I spoke to him on the innovation of publicity. "Yes," he said, "this is the first time, but I think the public, in the case of a disaster like this, should know what is being done." At the inquiry, Mr. Lloyd George himself was there, by the side of his inspector, putting questions with a somewhat irritating persistency, and with a careless disregard of whether or not he was usurping his inspector's privileges.

Here is another small personal incident, giving a hint of Mr. Lloyd George's character. Cabinet ministers, as a rule, with what is perhaps a justifiable regard for their dignity and convenience, are apt to be somewhat exclusive in their dealings with Pressmen, thinking, perhaps, that

they are not as scrupulous in keeping within the bounds of discretion as they should be, and that, more frequently than not, their efforts result in the hindrance of public business rather than in its promotion. Mr. Lloyd George, in office, was a revelation to Pressmen ; he treated them exactly as he used to do in his old back-bench days, with the friendly geniality natural to him, and with a quiet confidence in their discretion—a confidence which I do not think has ever been violated by journalists of any political opinion. During the anxious days when the great railway strike hung in the balance, the strain on the President of the Board of Trade is easily to be imagined. To most ministers, the fact that a little crowd of reporters was besieging the ministerial office from morning to night, waiting for news of the delicate and continuous negotiations, would have been a somewhat trying thing; and there would undoubtedly have been efforts to send them away. Some ministers would have endeavoured to ignore their presence. The attitude of Mr. Lloyd George was entirely different. He exchanged a chatty word with the reporters when he went into his department (though he could not be interviewed for publication), and he set aside a room for their convenience, giving instructions that tea was to be provided for them during their wait in the afternoon, and, finally, he sent them down cigarettes to help pass the time.

Mr. Lloyd George on the Treasury Bench developed into the great personal force of the chamber, which has rightly been called the most critical assembly in the world. An untirable, relentless fighter below the gangway, he became in office the urbane and reserved minister who was putting energy into office work instead of into debate.

Gone; at least for the present; were the old days of sword play, and at question-time he was always ready with courteous explanations to his opponents. So marked was the change that the Conservatives, while appreciating this sign of grace, were a little suspicious, rightly, I think, as to what their new minister would be doing later on—whether this veil of urbanity did not conceal the preparation of astounding Radical plans in the future. They vaguely felt that the old combativeness was merely quiescent for a time, and might presently break forth with an effectiveness increased tenfold by his ministerial authority. Occasionally, even now, there would be a flash of the old force—a reminder and a portent. For, whether in calm or in fighting mood, Mr. Lloyd George always carried an electrical atmosphere with him. Picture a slightly built man, whose habit of walking quickly was only to be modified by the obvious affectation of a stroll as he came up the floor of the House, a man with a broad white forehead and rather long, dark hair, brushed back in resolute fashion, a little, curved-in moustache, and shining blue eyes, quick to light with indignation, quicker still to light with merriment; a delicate face, quite smooth in repose, which vivacity covered all over with little criss-cross wrinkles as soon as he began to speak, and on which round the corners of the mouth, self-repression had brought a few “old man” lines. At a glance could be seen the keenness and eagerness which radiated from the man. There sat upon him a certain quizzicalness, a thoughtful air of mischief and a readiness to see fun; but there was also something which indicated that he was as ready for a fight as a joke, and that he could enjoy it just as much, if not a little more.

He very rarely lounged on the Treasury Bench in the manner of other ministers, but sat bolt upright; his wrists negligently crossed in his lap, with a pencil in the fingers of his right hand, ready to make a note on the white foolscap envelope held in the left.

As time went on Mr. Lloyd George developed a little. After he became Chancellor of the Exchequer, he had to defend his Budget proposals throughout the exciting months of 1909, and he found the need for some of his old fighting force not only in meeting ordinary criticism, but also in repelling personal attacks. He never affected the indifference of expression which is the traditional stock-in-trade of front bench occupants, and, as a rule, there was no doubt of the attention with which he followed the remarks of even the humblest of his critics.

He had, however, a distinctive little mannerism of his own in rising to make a reply, and that was an assumed leisureliness with which he got up from his seat, a mannerism more marked when he was about to make his most offensive response. On such occasions he would flatten out his notes carefully on the despatch-box with one hand, and begin his speech with a studied slowness, the measured, moderate words giving no hint of repressed feeling. But, having prepared the way, having stated the basis of his argument, with at times a frankly appealing manner, he would fasten on to his antagonists with a sudden bitter drollery, seizing on weak facts with humour, which, with all its lightness was, nevertheless, ferocious, and rebutting personal attacks on himself with an intensity of scorn impossible to any one but a man who feels that he has been misjudged by lesser men than himself. His body would be bent forward; his finger extended at the offender, and it

was indeed a thick skin which his barbed words could not pierce. At times his skill in slipping out of a debating cul de sac exasperated his critics almost more than his abuse. He could, however, stand hard blows good-humouredly, for whatever Mr. Lloyd George lacked, he did not lack courage, and he stood the rapier play of Mr. Balfour with an equanimity impossible to a good many distinguished men—impossible, for instance, to Mr. Winston Churchill.

With all his love of fighting, Mr. Lloyd George had plenty of tact. As his work increased in importance, his powers of persuasion found full scope, and he made remarkable use of what may be called a dynamic reasonableness. He would, so to speak, take the House into his confidence, tell members how, as a Liberal, he was bound to complete a certain portion of Liberal legislation; he knew honourable members disagreed with his opinions; but he put it to them as businesslike men, whether, if they were in his position, they would not endeavour by every means in their power to get through their legislation. Thus, he often managed to introduce a softer spirit into a debate—which is all to the good when a Minister is trying to pass legislative proposals.

Here, on the other hand, is an instance of his adroitness. The House was discussing the details of the Old Age Pensions Bill, and amendments were being moved, not merely by the Conservatives, but also by the Labour representatives, the latter continually pressing for the extension of the scope of the Bill. Mr. Lloyd George was full of sympathy, but held his ground. In effect, what he said was this: "This year we are making a start with old age pensions, and have a certain number of millions

for that purpose. It is a great departure to give old age pensions at all, and it may involve a far greater expenditure in years to come. If we attempt to overload this, our first attempt, with all the extensions you Labour men want, it will wreck the Bill by making it too elaborate and expensive to start with. Let us make a beginning with this comparatively moderate sum we have set aside. Don't destroy this, our first effort, by your indiscreet enthusiasm." The Labour men were not to be appeased; they continued to try for added benefits; and it was apparent that they were going to continue their work at every point throughout the Bill. Mr. Lloyd George, with an enormous Liberal majority, was able to push ahead with his own plans, so long as that majority was solid. But, presently, he found himself in a difficulty. Under the Government scheme a man and wife who were above seventy, living together, were to receive not five shillings a week each, but seven shillings and sixpence between the two. Mr. Barnes, a Labour member, moved to leave out this provision, so that each person should get five shillings. Promptly Mr. Lloyd George put forward his old arguments, but this time it was not only the Labour men who refused to be convinced, but Liberals as well. Here, there and everywhere on the back benches, Liberals were getting up to support the proposal of Mr. Barnes. The Conservatives were jubilant; for they saw plainly the difficulty of the Government. The House was crowded, and Mr. Lloyd George, in the middle of a long line of Ministers, was in charge. Excitement grew, and quickly a sense of drama made itself manifest. All present realised that here was one of those sudden crises to which the most powerful Government

is at times subject. Nothing would restrain the Liberals; and they declared their determination to vote for the amendment. Mr. Lloyd George put all his eloquence and parliamentary persuasiveness into play, but without effect. Matters were rapidly becoming serious for the Government, members were hurrying in from the Lobby, and the Prime Minister was sent for. Mr. Lloyd George decided on a bold stroke. He rose, declared his sympathy with the amendment, and pointed out once more that there was only a certain amount of money available for old age pensions, and that this sum could not be exceeded. He saw the justice of the argument for the amendment, and he saw that the general feeling of the House was in its favour. Only under one condition could the amendment be adopted. He could not afford to make the concession except on the understanding that his Liberal friends would support him consistently throughout the rest of the Bill, and enable him to complete its passage without further amendment, amendment which might cost the Government additional money. Would Liberals do that? There was a burst of consenting applause, and Mr. Lloyd George sat down, having achieved a greater victory than the House for the moment realised. But there was one keen mind who realised it, and that was Mr. Balfour. He was quickly on his feet, indicating what the pledge of the Liberals meant. It meant that if they solidly supported the Government now, no amendment by the Labour men, or the Nationalists, or the Conservatives, could possibly have a chance. Mr. Lloyd George at one stroke had cut away the independence of his supporters. They were now bound to see him through. Mr. Balfour was, of course, very critical about it, but he could not forbear

a tribute to the strategy of Mr. Lloyd George; developed; as it had been, in the emergency of the moment.

It was on that same Old Age Pensions Bill that there was another instance of Mr. Lloyd George's peculiar gifts. Methods of the Bill had been criticised, and here and there were downright objections to the Bill as a whole, and in the midst of the discussion occurred a very rare scene, lasting perhaps five minutes, when the whole of the assembly, diversely composed, animated by rivalry, personal as well as political, was surprised out of itself and all the antagonistic sections for a minute or two set quivering with sympathy. In the course of a speech, Mr. Lloyd George incidentally told of the silent bravery of a poor old woman who had worked all her life, who in her old age was earning about six shillings a week, out of which had to come her rent, and who had denied herself food so that she should amass enough to be buried, when her time came, without the aid of the parish. For a brief minute or two he forgot that he was a Cabinet Minister, forgot that he was anything but the champion of that drab old heroine. The soft Welsh intonation came from him in a torrent of feeling, as he flung out both hands towards the members and told of the pride of the old woman, her independence of soul, her unnoticed end. That eager figure, tense with feeling, that soft, rushing voice, that House full of motionless, listening members will always stay in my mind. I have never known a crowded House of Commons so silent. Probably Mr. Lloyd George has forgotten the incident. To me, it will remain as one of his greatest achievements.

CHAPTER III

THE BUDGET

THE drama of Parliament with its periods of high expectancy, of despair and indifference, with its small crises and occasional great culminations, with its astounding mixture of paltry personal ambitions and lofty exaltations is but little known to people at large. It finds but faint reflection in the newspapers, partly because writers and journals have to press vehemently their own particular set of partisan opinions, and have to force any excitement into the service of those opinions; partly because the small fringe of description which extends beyond party strife touches only the bright ephemeral incident, a Minister's epigram, a hot personal phrase from one private member to another, or perhaps the sudden rebellion of a few hitherto loyal men. Those electric feelings which set members shouting like thrilled school-boys, or reduce them to a palpitating silence, those feelings which turn the House sometimes into a solemn court of justice, sometimes into an arena where brilliant wits battle against each other mercilessly and tenaciously, sometimes into a mystic temple from the altar of which political high priests of the time deliver eagerly-awaited announcements which may alter some portion of a nation's

life—those feelings are not to be found reflected in any of the prints of the time. Yet they are the great human feature of Parliamentary life. With their many variations they give that fascination to Westminster which every member feels in some degree or other, and which once it has touched a man never leaves him.

It has been said that the most striking happenings at Westminster are the unexpected happenings. This is not absolutely correct. Sometimes a long-looked-forward-to event, a great political revealment, comes with all the more effect when its secrets have been guessed at for months, when all the world has been agog to get a hint of those secrets, and when on the appointed day, the announcement, full, definite, and clear, is made in the presence of the House of Commons, which has come together especially for that purpose. That was the position with regard to Mr. Lloyd George's Budget of April 29th, 1909. Every one knew that the first financial proposals of the Chancellor of the Exchequer were to be far-flung, wide in their scope. It was feared that he had in mind new taxation which would affect certain interests disastrously. The adroitness, the diplomacy which Mr. Lloyd George had displayed since he had been in office, did not do much to calm the fears of those opposed to him in politics, for they remembered the fibre of the man, remembered his peculiar quality of daring and his aptness in taking advantage of a promising situation. The fervour and reality of his Radical sentiments gave to the outlook a sinister importance which would never have been attached to the prospect of a Budget from, say, Mr. Haldane; Sir Edward Grey, or Mr. Asquith. Amid the chorus of belittling adjectives which came from political

opponents; there was always to be recognised a note of apprehensiveness. On the other hand, extreme Liberals and Socialists were filled with a pleasurable anticipation. Perhaps, after all, the man had been found to raise money for social reform regardless of outcry from the country's wealth and power. Mr. Lloyd George gave no hint. And the customary unbreakable secrecy with regard to Budget proposals helped to raise high the general excitement about the revelations to be made on April 29th.

On the memorable afternoon, members began to gather at Westminster directly after lunch. There was a crowd of visitors in the central hall, each ambitious for a seat in the Strangers' gallery, while the ladies, who had secured the few much-coveted places behind the grille, were watching the scene below them an hour before the Chancellor was expected to begin his speech. Special arrangements had been made for the dissemination of Mr. Lloyd George's proposals to the world in general. The Press gallery gives, even in normal times, a limited accommodation to the reporters, artists and sketch-writers, whose duty it is to picture Parliament for the benefit of the public, and, on an occasion like the present, it was obvious that the throng of Pressmen must necessarily be quite unusual—experts in finance would be present, leader-writers, editors, artists, descriptive writers—in addition to the ordinary corps of shorthand reporters, who themselves would be strengthened in numbers to deal with the great speech. The authorities of the House, realising the situation, broke all precedent, and allotted to the Press, in addition to their usual gallery; a line of seats in the Strangers' gallery at the other end

of the House. The concession was much appreciated; and was of great value to the whole body of newspaper men, since it not only gave comfortable accommodation in the new seats, but also lessened pressure in the old. The Chancellor himself lent a helping hand to the Pressmen. Realising the difficulties of the reporters' task; and the importance of having his facts and figures correctly distributed, he notified the Press gallery that at intervals of every quarter of an hour during his speech; he would send up for the use of the reporters the section of his notes dealing with the portion of his speech just concluded.

The House of Commons meets at 2.45, but prayers occupy some minutes, and the business of the day commences as a rule at about six minutes to three. I think that even a stranger, ignorant of politics, in the House that afternoon would have realised within a few seconds of the time that the Speaker took up the order paper of the day, that the occasion was an historic one. The sight alone was enough to thrill an Englishman. The Commons of the country were assembled practically in full strength to hear proposals as to how the British nation was to finance itself afresh in order to defend its shores; and to carry out great ideals for the amelioration of Fate's pressure on the millions of the poor. Near the surface was enmity ready to burst forth against the new-found statesman who, it was rumoured, intended to disturb the balance of society by putting heavy burdens on the rich.

The House of Commons, rectangular in shape; is split in halves by an open aisle, some twenty feet wide, from each side of which rises a spreading bank of green benches. At

one end of the aisle, with a full view of all the House, is the Speaker's canopied chair, and, in front of it, extending half a dozen paces down the floor, is the Table, on which are to be seen a little library of reference books; the despatch-boxes upon which Ministers and ex-Ministers spread their notes; and the great gilded Mace—symbol of authority. On the Budget afternoon, the open aisle from the end of the table was the only unoccupied space in the House of Commons. Never, perhaps in history has the Chamber been more crowded, for the packed members sat on the steps of the gangways which bisect the two sides of the House, others sat on the steps of the Speaker's chair, others again stood massed together in the space below the Bar at the end of the House. But that was only part of the assembly; some twenty-five feet above the floor the gallery round the walls gave accommodation to a remarkable and diverse gathering. Two narrow strips of seats along the sides were occupied by members who had not found places on the floor, and the two strips were joined over the Speaker's chair by the Press gallery to which I have already referred. At the other end of the House, the Gallery deepened into several rows of seats, giving places at the rear for many visitors, and in front for privileged individuals known as "Distinguished Strangers," and also for two score or so of Peers. All these seats, and every foot of standing room were blotted out by eager onlookers. Above the Press gallery was the famous grille, behind which were the lady visitors. The banked seats on the floor of the House, the people massed in the galleries, all with their eyes fixed down on to the Bench near the Table in the open space below them; gave a strange and irresistible

impression of some great play about to be enacted, with the stage awaiting the entry of the principal actor.

Electrical expectancy was in the air. The cadences of murmured undertones had a note of intensity in them. A good many members who had no direct connection with the Government had plainly been worked by the occasion to a state of nervousness, and it is not an exaggeration to say that no sensitive person could have entered the House without feeling the touch of the afternoon's hypnotism. The two Front Benches, as is their custom, kept up a demeanour of serenity, of something approaching indifference. From Mr. Balfour, the most self-possessed of men, this called for no affectation, but Mr. Austen Chamberlain, the ex-Chancellor of the Exchequer, sat with mouth set hard, and a stern, non-committal look, which served to hide his realisation of the importance of the day's event. He had had to introduce a Budget himself before now, and was, perhaps, better able than any other member to form an impression of the feelings of the Chancellor on the opposite side of the Table. But, apart from this, he must have known that on what his successor did that afternoon depended the immediate future of the Tariff Reform policy which his father, Mr. Joseph Chamberlain, had initiated, and of which he himself was at present the principal expositor.

But, if the afternoon was to be important to the Opposition; it was to be of tenfold importance to the Government. They were putting forward their champion who was not only to sweep away fiscal reform projects by a rich free trade revenue, but who was also to combine in his free trade Budget many of those Liberal ambitions which for a generation had been the life and soul of

progressive thought. Let Mr. Lloyd George fail this afternoon; and there would be an end for years to the Liberalism which mattered. The two men to whom the occasion meant most were perhaps the Prime Minister and Mr. Lloyd George. Mr. Asquith, as leader of the Government, would share any triumph due to his brilliant lieutenant; but he would also be crushed beneath any failure. To Mr. Lloyd George, of course, it was the great day of his life. He stood forward after a career of stress and fighting to be tried as a financial statesman; and the trial was one from which even the greatest man might momentarily shrink. On the other hand, his achievement; if it could be accomplished, would be enormous. The Chancellor had risen from poverty as a village boy to be the second Minister in the empire at forty-six; Mr. Gladstone, with advantages from his youth up became Chancellor of the Exchequer at forty-three. Mr. Gladstone's first Budget was a great point in his career. It is possible that some lightning thought of this flashed through Mr. Lloyd George's mind as he sat by the side of the Prime Minister, waiting for the Speaker to call upon him.

There were a few questions to Ministers on the order paper; and it was just after they had been commenced, at four minutes to three, that the Chancellor of the Exchequer came into the House, and, with his red despatch-box under his arm, stepped quickly and nervously along by the side of the Table to his place on the Treasury Bench. Encouraging Liberal cheers greeted him. He dropped down into his place between the Prime Minister and Mr. Churchill, and then, for exactly ten minutes, had to go through an ordeal of waiting. His

eyes were steady; but, to the close observer, it was apparent that he felt the pressure of that little interval. At six minutes past three, questions were over, and the Speaker, in his rich, resonant voice, announced "Mr. Chancellor of the Exchequer."

He looked an insignificant figure, this man, on whom all eyes in the House were turned with an eager attention. He looked smaller than he really was, standing at the Table, at the bottom of an assembly which was massed above him on each side, and looked down on him from heights. Nothing of the majesty of Gladstone here, nothing of the ponderous dignity of Harcourt, not even the statuesque placidity of Asquith—only a slight figure, tremulous with nerves. The listening faces reaching upwards from floor to roof, all turned in the one direction; the involuntary motionlessness of every one, and the rigid silence, gave somehow to the little figure at the Table an air of impotence. It seemed hard to believe that such an unpretentious person should be given the power to do tremendous things.

Mr. Lloyd George began quietly in conversational tone; and it was evident he was anxious to avoid anything in the nature of theatricality, to avoid manner, tone or phrase which might lead to the supposition that he was proposing or intending to propose great changes. He was like a quiet and business-like Under Secretary explaining departmental administration; and his quietness, strange to say, jarred on the sense of the dramatic, which all the preliminaries and all the surroundings had joined up to produce. We wanted the rolling eloquence of Gladstone to thrill us; the volume of great sentences;

balanced, unfaltering, reverberating. We got nothing of the kind.

Mr. Lloyd George seized the lapel of his coat with one hand, and with the other arranged some sheets of notes, and, in a matter-of-fact way, took the House into his confidence with regard to the magnitude of his task. As he turned with his explanations to various parts of the building, his voice, still very low, was imperfectly heard throughout the assembly. "Speak up," cried members. "I must ask the indulgence of the House," pleaded the Chancellor, "for I have to inflict myself on members for a considerable period, and I do not want to strain myself at the beginning." The House murmured its sympathy.

A brief introduction led the Chancellor of the Exchequer quickly to the explanation of why it was necessary to raise more money than had ever been raised before. This was the state of affairs he projected for the year beginning April 1st, 1909.

Expenditure calculated on the basis of estimates			
already presented to Parliament	..	..	£164,152,000
Revenue to be expected on the existing basis of			
taxation	..	..	£148,390,000
Deficit			15,762,000

He had thus to devise the means for raising the millions of difference. But he had a great deal more than this to do. He was faced on the one side by an automatic increase in the strength of our Navy and the constant pressure of a volume of opinion in the country that it should be continually enlarged; and on the other side, he had to face from the New Liberalism the louder and louder demand for efforts to make the hard life of the poor

somewhat easier; and for a step in the direction of giving to all classes "an equality of opportunity." The feature of the situation was that each of these demands, and especially the demand for social reform, would call for multiplying sums of money as the years went on, and that ultimately there would be required amounts at present unthought of. Some scheme had to be arranged for a progressive revenue, a revenue which would grow by itself, so to speak; and, withal, it was necessary that the new scheme should not impose intolerable burdens on the community as a whole or on any substantial part of it, but must, if it could be so arranged, make in the long run for general prosperity. Here, then, in the year 1909, was one of those great statesmanship problems which the progress of human thought brings before the directors of a nation at occasional periods of her history. The Tariff Reformers thought they saw the way to success by the establishment of import duties. It was for the Liberal Budget-maker, if possible, to show a different way. That Mr. Lloyd George had laid his plans for a big attempt to meet the case was apparent to all.

After referring to the anticipated deficit for the year with which he had to deal, Mr. Lloyd George swept on to tell of the calls which were being made upon him, and dealt first of all with the Navy. Liberals were rather surprised at his enthusiasm in this direction. For the first time a touch of animation was noticeable in his tones as he explained that a great country could not shirk its responsibility for the safety of its shores from invasion.

No member of the Government meant by any ill-judged parsimony to risk even for an hour the priceless national possession of safety. The Chancellor flung out

his arm in emphasis. "Such a stupendous act of folly in the present temper of nations would not be Liberalism, but lunacy." He told how vast an amount of money was necessary. Then he threw up into relief the condition of the struggling poor throughout the country, how the measures necessary for the amelioration of their condition; for their protection, for their education in various directions called for money, and money, and still more money. With regard to matters which did not directly affect his Budget, he looked far ahead, giving, in fact, the continuation and first sequels of his Budget without revealing the Budget itself. His intention was, of course, to indicate some of the directions from which would come calls on the finances of the country, calls which would have to be answered by the development of the arrangements which he was about to lay before the House.

Expenditure was for a long time his text, and there was no word as to where the money was to come from. The giving of a chance to the down-trodden, the helping of those weary and exhausted with the journey of life, these were the things which brought a spark to his eye, and swept away for a few passing moments his studied reticence of manner. From the schemes of the future, the insurance of workmen against illness and unemployment, he worked his way through the project soon to be realised of giving deserving paupers old age pensions, and then he came to a different scheme of spending, a fund for which was to be inaugurated under the Budget. There were various ways, he said, in which the country-side could be developed, by new methods of agriculture, by light railways, by the encouragement of afforestation, of stock-breeding, of the reclamation of land. Efforts in these

directions would help very much those who were on the land, and would provide for others opportunities which did not exist. He proposed, therefore, to start what was to be called a Development Fund with the sum of £200,000. Still no mention of the source of the money. Apart from the routine millions of the current year, Mr. Lloyd George had already outlined an expenditure of scores of millions in years to come, but as yet the House had received no hint as to the rock this modern Moses was to strike for the stream of money. Moreover, when the moment came a few minutes later for his announcement of the first of the new taxes, it brought the explanation at the same time that the new receipts would be devoted to a particular object, and were not to be placed in the common fund. Motorists were to be heavily taxed in a new way, but the proceeds were to be given to improving the roads, and not towards the support of the country in general.

It was only a matter of seconds now, however, before Mr. Lloyd George was to commence the series of proposals by which he hoped to divert the river of gold from the parklands and the wide acres and direct it to the teeming mean streets where hard days' labours (and sometimes the public house) kept drudgers from realising the hopelessness of their outlook. The House of Commons, for all its democratisation, is still a middle-class and upper-class assembly, and when Mr. Lloyd George began what one may call his vital proposals by the statement that he intended to raise the income tax from one shilling to one shilling and twopence in the pound, there was a curious psychological effect. Members seemed to take a breath as though at the first impact of a douche of cold water; and then a rising murmur, mixed with cheers, and with something

suggestive of a groan spread over all the House. Labour members applauded steadily, and the richer Liberals pulled themselves together and joined in. It may be suspected that some of those who were silent were at heart with the murmuring Conservatives.

But now, fairly embarked on his task, Mr. Lloyd George did not hesitate, and with detail, with argument, with illustration, he explained new taxes and the increase of old taxes. All people with incomes of £5000 a year and more, were to pay a super-tax of sixpence for every pound of income above £3000. Big increases were to be made in the cost of stamps used in connection with the transfer of property, heavy additions were to be imposed to the duties charged on great estates when they descended to new owners. No one in that crowded House moved or said a word while Mr. Lloyd George poured out his merciless demands on the rich and comfortable. Rebutting arguments, angry denials, scornful revolt against unwarranted deductions found articulation in the coming weeks of battle, but on that afternoon all feelings were swamped in the surprise at the length, breadth, and depth of the Chancellor's demands. Even his friends felt the audacity of this slight little figure at the Table of the House of Commons. The nervous determination of the Chancellor as he went on, gave a hint to some who listened, that there were greater sensations to come than they had yet experienced.

The tremendous complexity of a Budget was never better shown than during this exposition of the year's financial propositions, each of which necessitated justification; not only from what we may call the general or ethical side, but also from the business point of view.

A little sermon and a balance sheet had to be presented in respect of each, and no doubt could exist as to the conscientiousness of Mr. Lloyd George in providing himself with facts and figures. He avoided as the plague, any trace of declamation ; he was the business man, anxious to show that his Budget was practical as well as fair and honest, and the necessary figures and arithmetical demonstrations gave the listening House little periods in which to recover from the shocks of new and increased taxes. It had become obvious to the Conservatives in the House that this reforming Budgeteer had, in truth, entered upon the outrageous efforts occasionally feared from him, was indeed devoid of moderation, and, in spite of his Board of Trade education, had been carried away by his own ideals. The extreme Ministerialists were delighted. Here, at last, was the Radical chief who could not only talk but act. The Conservatives lifted their eyebrows and shrugged their shoulders. They thought they knew the worst. Even Mr. Lloyd George could not go farther in his first Budget. They did not know Mr. Lloyd George.

At six o'clock, when the Chancellor of the Exchequer had been speaking for nearly three hours, there was a remarkable interruption. The strain of making a Budget speech is great under any circumstances, but when a Budget speech is to open a new political era, and when it has to be delivered before a gathering fully cognisant of its import and meaning, the task becomes one to try the nerves of even the greatest of statesmen. I do not know whether Mr. Lloyd George's nerves were shaken or not; but certainly the strain affected his physique. Perhaps the influence on him was twofold. He did not look a very

strong man bodily ; he had all the Celtic sensitiveness, and he was often at a tension when outwardly he was the picture of placidity. He had been speaking for nearly three hours on this occasion, and close observers noticed that his face was growing pale. Though his words still came smoothly and uninterruptedly, three men were watching him anxiously. Mr. Asquith and Mr. Churchill, sitting one on each side of him, had seen his symptoms of fatigue, and were obviously getting ready to interfere, and, on the other side of the Table, Mr. Balfour, valiant fighter, but most chivalrous of opponents, was no less alertly observant. Presently Mr. Asquith, leaning forward in his seat, threw up a whispered remark to the Chancellor—apparently a request that he should take a short breathing space. But Mr. Lloyd George disregarded the suggestion, and pushed on. Thereupon Mr. Asquith left his seat, passed behind the speaking Chancellor to the Chairman; with whom he had a conversation in undertones for a few seconds. Returning, he again tried to induce his exhausted colleague to sit down, and again Mr. Lloyd George smilingly disregarded the suggestion. But the persistent Welshman had overrated his strength. At half-past six he gave in. “ I thought I should be able to finish,” he said, in faint tones, “ but if I may ask the indulgence of the House—— ”

Mr. Balfour, always the first with courtesy to an adversary, was instantly on his feet on the other side of the table, flinging across a low-voiced suggestion to the Prime Minister. Mr. Asquith quickly muttered a reply. “ Half an hour,” were the only words heard by people in the gallery above.

Whispers of wonderment ran round the House, and

then; without a remark; the Chairman (Mr. Emmott) stepped from his place on to the floor of the House, thus automatically adjourning the sitting. It was like the curtain halfway in a play; the members surged out into the Lobby, talking as eagerly about the unexpected break in the proceedings as about the Budget revelations which had preceded it. And, in the midst of the hubbub, the overwrought Chancellor passed out behind the Speaker's Chair for his half-hour's rest in company with the Prime Minister and Mr. Churchill.

When the House reassembled, it was seen at once that Mr. Lloyd George had been much revived by the interval; and he plunged into the second half of his Budget with something approaching enthusiasm. He knew, if the House did not, that he was now getting near to the climax. He had two topics to deal with—land and liquor. A general expectation of some kind of land taxation had been prevalent for weeks, and there was also the hope on one side and the fear on the other that the liquor trade of the country would have further burdens placed upon it. The throwing out of the Licensing Bill, in 1908, had led to the more or less open threat by the Government as to the course to be pursued in a subsequent Budget. The Chancellor soon showed that the threat was to be made good, and with vehemency in his voice he told how some of his efforts were being directed towards "the places which live by swilling and tippling." He backed up clear words with strong figures and explained how a network of new charges was to be thrown over the whole industry. Retailers, brewers, distillers, dealers—all were to pay their share: millions were to come from them. Ejaculations and hurried pieces of comment mingled with the

cheers which the announcement of each new impost drew forth, Mr. Lloyd George went on steadily drawing sheaves of fresh notes from his despatch-box on the Table, telling in tones of reasonableness and inevitability of the great sums he proposed to abstract from this section and that section of the community. With his red despatch-box this little man was like a figure of Fate, and he struck blows, and continued to strike them, in the manner of one dealing out cold justice which could no longer be delayed.

If the news about liquor was surprising, what can be said about the land taxes? The landowner was to be taxed in a way that he had never been taxed before. Conservatives had expected something of the kind, but nevertheless the actual proposals came upon them in the nature of a shock. Smoothly and fluently, Mr. Lloyd George laid down his new code, and the House listened in a silence which must have added to the strain on his nerves. There were to be great alterations in the future; landowners were to be taxed not nominally on the value of their land, but on the amount of the additional value which accrued to it from that day forward by reason of circumstances for which they were not responsible, from the enterprise of the community, or of the landowner's neighbours; they were to be taxed, moreover, on undeveloped land, land held up to increase its value when the use of it might provide much-wanted houses; and again, taxes were to be imposed on the great untouched mineral properties underground. To say the House was staggered by these proposals expresses inadequately the feeling of the assembly that afternoon. We have become accustomed now to the principles of the Budget,

but on April 29th; 1909, they produced a bewildered amazement.

The Chancellor's most telling stroke was delivered when at the end of the recital of new taxes; he said mildly; that; for the purposes of the Budget, there was to be commenced a valuation of all the land in the country. The full consequences of this project did not for a moment come home to the House, which was struggling to assimilate all that had gone before. In the weeks that followed, there was a realisation of the possible consequences of the new Domesday Book—a record which was to give the Government invaluable information as to the wealth of the wealthy, and to make it easy to impose new loads of taxation in the future.

In the course of the struggle that took place during the following months, in reference to which I shall have something to say later, the Conservatives succeeded in obtaining various modifications of details, various changes to meet hard cases, but, nevertheless, in spite of these the Budget in all its essentials was carried into law. Legislation is founded on the Budget by means of a subsequent Finance Act, and it will be sufficient for my purpose to indicate here a few of the outstanding taxes as they were ultimately formulated under the Act.

Increment Value Duty.

A tax of £1 to be paid for every £5 of increment value accruing after April 30th; 1909.

Reversion Duty.

A tax of £1 to be paid for every £10 of the value accruing to a lessor by reason of the determination of a lease.

Undeveloped Land Duty.

A tax of $\frac{1}{2}d.$ to be paid for every £1 of value of undeveloped land, the provisos including one that the tax should not be charged on land where the site value did not exceed £50 an acre.

Mineral Rights Duty.

A tax of one shilling to be paid for every £1 of the rental value of the rights to work minerals.

Of the actual financial details of the Budget (afterwards adjusted in various directions), it is not necessary to say much more than that by a reduction of three million pounds in the fixed debt charge, and by the anticipation of a first year's harvest of something over fourteen million pounds from the new and increased taxes, Mr. Lloyd George was enabled to wipe off his anticipated deficit of nearly sixteen millions, to provide for the allotment of amounts for the inauguration of some of his Budget proposals, and to leave himself an estimated margin for contingencies of nearly half a million pounds. But with all these arrangements the Budget remained essentially a Budget for the future. Friends and opponents alike acknowledged this, and the prospect was one which gave rise to exultant hopes and despairing fears. Later, I shall show the Conservative point of view. The Liberal outlook is given in the words with which the Chancellor concluded his speech : " The money thus raised is to be expended first of all in ensuring the inviolability of our shores. It has also been raised in order not merely to relieve, but to prevent unmerited distress within those shores. It is essential that we should make provision for the defence of our country. But, surely, it is equally imperative that we should make it a country even better worth defending

for all and by all. And it is that this expenditure is for both these purposes that alone can justify the Government. I am told that no Chancellor of the Exchequer has ever been called upon to impose such heavy taxes in a time of peace. This, Mr. Chairman, is a war Budget. It is for raising money to wage implacable warfare against poverty and squalidness. I cannot help hoping and believing that before this generation has passed away, we shall have advanced a great step towards that good time when poverty and wretchedness, and the human degradation which always follows in its camp, will be as remote from the people of this country as the wolves which once infested its forests."

On the stroke of eight, after a speech of four hours and a half, Mr. Lloyd George dropped in his seat, his task completed. Members were regaining their tongues, and a vibrant hum, like that of the wind which deepens as it presages a great storm, ran all over the green benches and up through the galleries.

Mr. Lloyd George was being congratulated by the Prime Minister from the one side, while from the other Mr. Churchill patted his knee in recognition of his efforts. He was evidently exhausted, but, though his slim figure was relaxed, his eyes were lively and pleasant. He was like a man who has taken the first step towards a distant shining goal.

CHAPTER IV

THE FIGHT OF THE CONSERVATIVES

THE invulnerability of the Conservative position; and the practical acceptance of that invulnerability by the Liberal leaders over a long period of years had produced a passive sense of security in all those who may be described as composing the Conservative party. Deeply embedded in the British nature is a political caution, a suspicion of quick reform, a dogged desire for stability and a dislike of theatric change; and though these influences grow less and less in the minds of reformers as they become possessed of the consciousness of social injustices, yet they are, nevertheless, in some degree at work in the collective mind of all the nation. Behind the boundary-line where an appreciation of modern conditions and a growing knowledge of unmerited suffering tempers these influences with the consideration as to whether some kind of reform may not be advisable, behind this boundary-line is a great mass of determined solid honest opinion not to be shaken. This Conservatism had for nearly twenty years reposed in confidence either on the Conservative majority in the House of Commons or on the Conservative majority in the House of Lords; or on both together. It was felt and rightly felt that any change, reform, or

innovation which escaped the meshes would be of such a nature that while it might be more or less undesirable, it would not be in any sense disastrous. When a large proportion of the electors, stirred for the time from what may be called their natural Conservatism by a variety of causes, helped to return the Liberals to power by an enormous majority, there was, of course, deep disappointment, while here and there were expressions of dismay and dark forebodings. But on the whole, the Conservatives took their defeat with equanimity, for they knew that though their pride was shattered, their principles were in little danger. The administration of the country's business might be Liberalised to some extent, and a few measures of legislation might be passed, but the measures would certainly not be very terrible ones; the House of Lords with its majority of five to one would see that the community it represented was not wronged. Calm Conservative observers could therefore afford to smile at the impetuosity and fierce resolves of the New Liberalism; for in the long run the New Liberalism was bound to break itself against the bars of its great legislative prison.

Whatever the defects of the House of Lords as a deliberative body, it was undoubtedly representative of deep and widespread feeling in the community, representative not only of the aristocracy, but representative also; unofficially and indirectly, of most of the wealth and practically all the social power of the country. Leisured squires in the counties, the clergy, many of the wealthy manufacturers, the official classes and all that great scattered family labelled "of independent means," were massed solidly behind the House of Lords; and had faith in its powers to checkmate any extreme or hazardous

Wealth

Radicalism. Not that any real danger was anticipated. Since the giants had departed a generation before, Radicalism had been a spent force with no power to stir the embattled Conservatism standing firm and gathering strength from year to year. True, in 1894, there had been a shock from Sir William Harcourt's death duties, but since that time no emergent Liberal force had shaken the accepted order of things. It came about, therefore, that after the first amazement, the advent of the great Liberal majority caused no more than an occasional passing shudder; and there remained the vague consciousness that nothing really serious could happen in the face of all that was most substantial in the country. Good reason was there for this feeling, because there could be no mistaking the national advantages in the political contest of that great part of the community which held these opinions. It is easy now to see that Conservatives underrated the forces opposed to them, did not take into account the virility of the New Liberalism nor appreciate the powers of the fresh personalities which were directing it.

The Government proposed its Education Bill, its Licensing Bill and other controversial measures, and they were killed by the Lords. The Conservative community throughout the country uttered a sigh of relief. It is impossible not to understand their feelings and not to experience a ripple of sympathy. Why put forward these extraordinary changes? Here was an unequalled nation, the richest and greatest in existence, which by its character and energy had built up an empire reaching across the globe, with Parliamentary institutions which were the admiration of every state. The millions of

our population were welded in a common sentiment unsurpassed since history began, making unshakable the foundations of our nationality. We had fought our way to modern conditions very slowly, and now, class for class, we were perhaps the most contented and prosperous people on the face of the earth. Admitted that we had vast crowds of silently enduring poor (the poor we have always with us, as has every great nation), but the way to ameliorate the evils among them was not to disturb the comfort, convenience, or property of the rich, but to increase the prosperity of rich and poor alike by putting a tax on foreigners' goods coming into this country, thus providing revenue and increasing home manufactures at one stroke. That was the course to pursue, not to disturb the elaborate and happy system, the pride of the world, by sudden incursions into the liberty of the individual and by depredations on the privileged in order to benefit the unhappy. Property, whether obtained without effort or built up by the hardest of labour, had its inalienable rights, and violently to outrage those rights was not only unjust to the persons chiefly concerned, but dangerous to the State at large.

Feelings engendered by thoughts like these grew into a passionate belief akin to religion with great masses of the people of the country. It is not hard to realise, therefore, the shocked feelings, the indignation, the horror; which met Mr. Lloyd George's Budget when its full extent, its effects, and its ultimate purposes were realised. What struck every one was that here was something with a deadly practicability about it. This Welshman was not going to be content with a proposal which would have no other result than to provide opportunity for

Parliamentary phrases and verbal threats against the party of privilege. Both the informed and the uninformed knew that they were face to face with a man who had set out to do things. The Conservatives in general saw in the Chancellor a thoroughly unscrupulous politician who would stop at nothing in the shape of trickery to secure political ends for his own personal aggrandisement. (An estimable Conservative lady, well-to-do, of cultured manners, told me very seriously that the Chancellor was trying to gain notoriety in order to secure a baronetcy for himself.) But the political leaders knew they had to meet a skilful chief who was attempting a highly ingenious flanking movement; who, failing to pass Liberal legislation by direct means, was assembling many ideas of the New Liberals in a money bill, in reliance on the fact that by the growth of custom the Lords neither amended nor rejected a measure of that kind. The talent of the new political strategist was at once acknowledged, and the Conservative party awoke from their dream of security. The property-owning element was in a ferment. There were meetings and consultations. The Conservative newspapers dashed into the fray with appeals, arguments, and denunciations. The trumpets of war were sounded throughout the drawing-rooms of the country. That was the state of affairs when the House of Commons was fairly embarked on the discussion of Mr. Lloyd George's proposals.

Who then were the political leaders, to whom fell the task of articulating the intense feelings of a great part of the community? Among the Conservatives in the House of Commons towered high Mr. Balfour. He and two others; whom I will mention presently,

were the principal figures in the fierce and protracted battle which went on throughout the year. On the whole, however, I think it may be said that the contest was a soldier's battle—as distinguished from one in which generalship plays an important part. It was largely the ingenuity, the insistency, and courage of the back-bench Conservatives which kept the fight going through the summer, through the autumn, practically up till Christmas. When all Mr. Balfour's high qualities are taken into account, he was not (and this by reason of some of his greatest qualities) a dominant, crushing, fighting commander. It was an unfortunate period for Conservatism. The intellectual tide had ebbed from the party—no doubt to flow again in the future—but leaving Conservatism in the meantime very nearly stranded. People who were convinced that the New Liberal doctrines were morally wrong as well as economically disastrous, were compelled to admit (sadly enough) that the Government Front Bench had a superiority of hard brain power compared with the Opposition Front Bench. And the Government seniors were backed up by younger men not less gifted. Those who know anything of Parliamentary procedure, and of how brain on the wrong side or the right side makes for the welfare of a party, can easily imagine the power of a Government which included among its members Mr. Asquith, Mr. Lloyd George, Mr. Haldane, Mr. John Morley, Mr. John Burns, Mr. Winston Churchill, and Mr. Herbert Samuel. Whatever may be thought of principle, there can be no doubt that the weight of intellectuality was overwhelmingly on the Government side.

The strangely elusive individuality of Mr. Balfour, the

vague, varying and yet compelling reasons for his leadership, made up a study in personality which was at once deep and tantalizing. He captured the eye and the imagination immediately. Tall, erect, thin, looking less than his sixty years, Mr. Balfour carried with him an indefinable graciousness, a certain soft reflectiveness in expression, voice and manner, which were the outward marks of subtle power. The silvery hair, the delicately poised head, the gentle eyes, pleasantly frank, and yet so obviously reserved, the refined features, and a certain young-man vivacity of the face, gave him an ever-present attractiveness. There was a temperamental artistry about him; and it was easy for the observer to know that he was fond of music and of beautiful things. It was hard to imagine Mr. Balfour doing anything ungenerous. You knew without reasoning that his words would be in the best form only, that within him lay culture, that externally he would be courtly, considerate, effective. But the endowments thus indicated could not have taken him to the command of one of the great parties in the State, had they not been supplemental to other qualities which, though not obvious at a glance, nor indeed sometimes to be ascertained with a month's acquaintance, had yet made their mark on the political history of the country. The charm of Mr. Balfour's manner had its counterpart in a courage and a tenacity such as do not often outside the pages of romance go with the outward graces.

He was a clever but not too serious young man when he entered Parliament in 1874, and his obvious delight in the paths of pleasant culture did not lead any one to regard him as an ambitious or deeply earnest politician. As years went on he gave evidence of wide reading and

much thought and power of expression. Philosophic wanderings took him from the field of politics for a time ; but nevertheless, Parliamentary work always had attractions for him, though he seemed to be a little shy of the arduous side of it. To call him a brilliant trifler is perhaps going too far, but certainly there were few indications of the man who was to make practical statesmanship his lifework. How the Nationalists gloated when in troublous Irish times Lord Salisbury appointed his nephew Chief Secretary ! " We'll make short work of Clara," they exclaimed. Never has a political party received a greater shock. In his new office some of the hidden part of Mr. Balfour came to light ; and the quick-witted Irishmen were among the first to realise that they had no weakling to deal with. Still smooth in manner, Mr. Balfour became the man in earnest, and he took up the fight with a certain complacent keenness and restrained enthusiasm which in themselves were a warning signal to his enemies. Various and severe were the onsets made on him in the House of Commons ; he never flinched, he never gave away a foot, he even carried the attack into the enemy's quarter. His onslaughts became known for a kind of polished ferocity. No weakness here, rather a deadly strength. Regardless of protests Mr. Balfour put down lawlessness with a strong hand—his opponents said it was the hand of a tyrant rather than that of a statesman. But whatever the appraisal of his work at that time, there could be no doubt that he emerged from it with a reputation for courage, pertinacity and political skill, a reputation the more surprising in view of his previous record. No longer were there taunts of " pretty Clara," and the Irishmen, quick to

know a man of fibre; realised that they had, and always would have, in Mr. Balfour a foeman worthy of all their own great fighting qualities. Throughout his subsequent career Mr. Balfour never failed to show the distinctive elements within him—the artist's dislike of routine, the soldier's love of fighting against odds, the strategist's power of swift and secret action, the subtle thinker's inclination for graceful casuistry, the aristocrat's aversion from the simpler emotions as important factors in the theory or practice of government.

Here, then, was the man who had the leadership of the Conservative Party. His very gifts limited his powers. He did not, perhaps, as a statesman, always give due weight to the elementary desires of a great part of it. His intellectuality together with his natural fastidiousness made him timid over enthusiasm for a popular desire. It was a good Conservative tendency, but in Mr. Balfour's case it was noticeable in a degree which would have been very damaging to a politician of lesser calibre. The voice of the people was not the voice of God—especially where the people were demanding for their own benefit the further modifications, small or great, of any of those rights of society which are adjusted by degrees as centuries go on. He saw the dangers of ill-instructed desire, and he was in this sense as in some others the traditional Conservative, maintaining the essence of Conservatism where many of his nominal followers would have advocated a policy more in accord with the spirit underlying the claims of Radicalism.

With all his admirable gifts Mr. Balfour could never have been a leader to stand out in history, a leader of genius who did great and surprising and successful things. He

had not the gleaming eye of faith. He seemed to me to be unable to put himself at the head of a crusade, incapable of being uplifted by some great issue which should give him the inspiration to rouse the hearts and stimulate the minds of his hundreds of thousands of followers. It has never appeared that he could be magnetised by an idea. Indeed, I am sure that if he had felt himself becoming magnetised in that way, he would at once have begun to suspect the origin of the inspiration and its worth. And so it can be easily understood how, with all his resources of knowledge, his wit, his irony, his power of language, he was not equipped to rouse the House of Commons in the way available to men in some respects not equal to himself. His effectiveness was often cloaked by the subtle disorder of his speeches, by his split arguments split and split again by his digressions, quite charming in themselves. He saw genuine defects in his opponents' logic which were not perceptible to the less acute eyes of most of his audience, and his keen sensibility led him to deal with points often too fine and delicate to be placed at their correct value by the cruder politician. The cruder politician might have replied that with rough subjects to deal with, it was necessary to handle them at once and in a rough and ready manner. That was not Mr. Balfour's way.

Here, then, in the dexterous sweet-mannered inflexible aristocrat, was the man leading the Conservative Party; the captain of the hosts fighting Mr. Lloyd George and the Budget.

Who were his lieutenants? I intend at this point to name but two, the two whom I consider to have been the principal figures in the struggle that occurred during the

ensuing months. Good and effective service was given and lusty blows were struck by many, but surveying now the operations on that widespread field the two men who present themselves most clearly to the mind's eye are Mr. Austen Chamberlain and Mr. F. E. Smith. The former who had held offices of various kinds in the Unionist Ministry was for a brief period towards its close Chancellor of the Exchequer, and on him fell the duty of leading the financial attack on the Budget as well as that of seconding Mr. Balfour in general. I shall state at once that his work was extremely well done. There is always an under-current of disparagement beneath the comment on the work of a public man who happens to be the son of a very distinguished father, and Mr. Austen Chamberlain did not escape the common fate. There have been shrugs of the shoulder at his rapid advancement to high position, and sneers have not always originated among his political foes. The general opinion that he had received his first great chance at an early age by reason of the eminence of his father, Mr. Joseph Chamberlain, cannot perhaps be controverted. Nor can it be said that Mr. Austen Chamberlain made any great or dramatic success in his earlier years. He was just the ambitious plodding politician with a good deal of common sense, a somewhat hesitating manner of speech and a much-felt lack of humour. Nevertheless, he had a good share of political sagacity, and he never shirked hard work or hard fighting. When Mr. Balfour made him Chancellor of the Exchequer, many people said, "Fortunate for him that he is the son of his father. That's the secret of it." In my opinion, after observations of Mr. Chamberlain extending over a number of years, that was by no means the

secret of it. Much natural ability; great energy; and unusual determination were concealed beneath the rather halting words of the young politician. He had yet to prove himself a big figure, but in the matter of ability alone it is hard to see where Mr. Balfour with the material at his command could have picked a better man.

It was during the Budget fight of 1909 when Mr. Austen Chamberlain was in Opposition that he greatly increased his power in the House of Commons. The Government forces faced him in overwhelming strength of numbers, and on the Front Bench directly opposite to him were politicians who possessed far greater gifts than himself. And yet Mr. Chamberlain achieved, I think; the most marked success in his career up to that time; strengthened his hold over followers and opponents alike; and displayed those peculiarly British qualities which every section and every party in this country unconsciously look for in their leaders. I have always thought that from Mr. Austen Chamberlain's point of view, it was unfortunate that he should have adopted some of the externals of his father—the inevitable frock coat, the clean shaven face, the single eyeglass, the hair brushed back in that curiously alert way, all gave the impression of the son who was modelling himself on a set pattern; and helped to strengthen the suspicion that he had made his progress on the reputation of his progenitor. His speech, too, seemed to suggest that he was copying the clear-cut mordant tones of the great Birmingham statesman. But from the time he was in Opposition Mr. Austen Chamberlain developed a freedom and easiness in debate unknown to him before. The fact that he was faced by open enemies instead of backed by critical friends gave

him both courage and confidence, and he forgot that he was the son of Joseph Chamberlain, and stood up before friends and enemies in the happy and certain knowledge that Austen Chamberlain was quite capable of meeting the situation. His popularity grew rapidly. Here was a man who wielded the battle-axe in a way to be seen and appreciated by all, and the hearts of Conservatives were always gladdened when he sprang to the Table to make one of his attacks. He differed from Mr. Balfour in a hundred ways. For instance he had not the Conservative leader's rare and almost unequalled gift of delicate improvisation, of wounding raillery, but he had something which the rank and file were better able to understand—the gift of presenting facts in an ordered businesslike way, and of making figures clear; and, best gift of all, that of showing how sober facts and figures were in themselves damning of the Government's proposals. The listener felt that it was not Mr. Austen Chamberlain who had been successful, but just those commonplace facts and figures. It was an example of the art which conceals art, and of course there was more in the personality that achieved the result than was seen on the surface.

He always knew his case thoroughly, and he devoted himself to his work without stint of labour. Mr. Balfour had a way of treating figures as light and airy nothings; to Mr. Chamberlain they were part of a religious creed. Solid industry is always a great weapon for the politician, and Mr. Austen Chamberlain had it in abundance; afternoon and evening, during the night, throughout the early hours of the morning, week after week, he was at his post facing the Government. Mr. Balfour who is physically delicate, and is of course not so young a man,

rarely stayed through an all-night sitting ; Mr. Chamberlain rarely missed one. No hour found his passion for fighting abated, no hour, however late, found him unable to comprehend those complex conditional provisions and provisos with which the Budget Bill abounded. He was always ready to give a lead to the ardent band behind him; always ready to back them up in any attack they initiated on their own account. In short, he was a good stiff upstanding Englishman; seeking no favour, and prepared for any emergency. It is, I think, no wonder that the House of Commons, apart from political opinion, liked and respected him more and more as the Budget fight progressed.

The third Conservative leader was entirely different from either Mr. Balfour or Mr. Chamberlain. In the new Parliament of 1906 he came in as a young man in the middle thirties, and burst upon the political world with a brilliant maiden speech which revealed a fresh force in politics.

Mr. F. E. Smith had been President of the Union at Oxford, and after a distinguished career at the University he had been called to the Bar, where he soon made a way for himself as a pleader. He was elected as a Unionist for the Walton division of Liverpool in 1906. He came to the House of Commons thirty-four years of age, looking like a clean-shaven stripling still at college. His first speech lifted him high in the opinion of Parliamentary critics, and subsequent speeches increased his reputation. From the beginning a new and striking House of Commons figure, it was apparent he was setting himself out to achieve Parliamentary distinction. Many start for the same goal. One in a hundred perhaps reach it after a

quarter of a century of arduous effort. Mr. Smith reached it in a few months.

His appearance helped him. Of slender build and with delicate boyish features, he was always exquisitely dressed, while his dark smooth hair seemed ironed flat to his long well-shaped head. His manner of speech was no less noticeable, his voice of peculiarly pleasant timbre was clear and far-reaching, and he cultivated a certain soft fierceness in delivery which was novel. He talked swiftly, too swiftly,—a fault which he afterwards corrected,—and his words came from him in a sort of rushing lullaby with a rising and falling sibilance which held one strangely. But the words were a lullaby only in form; for it was above all things what Mr. Smith said, and not the way he said it, which brought him into notice and kept him there. Almost immediately he proved himself a master of invective, that invective which lies in poignant suggestion, and he had a lightning-like quickness in discerning the weak parts of his opponent's case. Merciless was his exposure of those weak parts. The talent for probing words was his in a remarkable degree; and he could formulate stinging epigrams with unbroken facility and deliver them with unwavering softness of tone.

As time went on; Mr. Smith brought what might be called more solid qualities into play. His lawyer's training served him well, and he learned to put a House of Commons case with ordered fulness, with clear brevity; and with nothing more than a suspicion of that picturesqueness which is not encouraged in full-grown statesmen. During the Budget fight, there was much enthusiastic effort among the lawyers, bankers, country gentlemen and young

noblemen by whom Mr. Smith was surrounded; but in brilliance he outshone them all, and as time went on he came to be regarded in the light of an unofficial chief of free-lances.

The Budget was attacked violently from the first, chiefly on what was considered its trend towards Socialism and its taint of revolution. The various preliminary discussions gave opportunity for declarations of unwavering hostility towards it, and when the new proposals had been formulated into the Finance Bill and the latter came before the House, there began that hand-to-hand fight which lasted through the rest of the spring, through the summer and the autumn; right up to the end of the year. One or two extracts will give an idea of the objections urged by the Conservatives against the Budget. Here is a lucid passage from a speech by Mr. Austen Chamberlain on June 7, 1909, when he moved the rejection of the Finance Bill on the motion for its second reading. "What is the claim made by the Prime Minister and by the Chancellor of the Exchequer on behalf of this Budget? It is, that having to provide additional revenue of something like sixteen millions, they have done so without disturbance of business, without any violence to the canons of sound finance, and in perfect harmony with the principle of our existing system. I challenge every one of those assertions; I say that by every one of those tests the Budget fails.

"Ask hotel-keepers and restaurant-keepers; ask distillers and agriculturalists dependent on them, ask any one connected with land or house property, ask the small cultivator-owner, say in Worcestershire or other parts of the country, ask the owners of garden cities who have

made a most desirable experiment; ask the insurance companies and the friendly societies with their vast investments in mortgages and ground rents, ask small tradesmen and thrifty workmen with whom no form of investment is more popular than that in small house property, ask builders who are engaged in the development of land round our great cities—and one and all will reply that you have upset every calculation on which they have hitherto proceeded. They will also tell you that they are now obliged to consider if they are to carry on at all in their old forms businesses which your Budget renders impossible. The taxes which the Government impose by this Budget are bad in themselves; that is not all. The principles of the Government are worse. Your super-tax is to stand at 6*d*. An income over £3000 is considered by the Government to be a superfluity when the total income exceeds £5000 a year. That is for the present. Mr. Snowden (the Socialist member for Blackburn) says that is very well for a beginning; he says, ‘You are apt pupils. We will build on this foundation in future years.’

“Your undeveloped land duty stands at a halfpenny in the pound, ‘A poor thing, but mine own,’ says the Lord Advocate. Again that will be a beginning. Your reversionary duty is ten per cent., your increment duty is twenty per cent. Increments are considered as unearned windfalls, and their owners should be happy if we leave them any part of them. If you take only one-tenth or one-fifth you say, ‘See how moderate we are’ (Labour cheers). Again comes that sinister echo from below the gangway, where the real authors of the Budget sit. What security or confidence have you left to any man who has

invested money in the class of property which comes under your ban? Every argument in defence of this fact, every statement you make justifies a further raid upon the line upon which the Government have started. This is no temporary disturbance of trade you are making—I mean of a particular trade—such as occurs when there is an increase or decrease of a duty like the tea duty. You are creating and maintaining a general and permanent spirit of unrest, disturbance and distrust, which will have an effect upon the portions of our country long after you have ceased to be responsible for it.”

It was the Lord Advocate, Mr. Ure, who had the task of replying to Mr. Chamberlain on this occasion, and it may be interesting perhaps if I quote just a paragraph from that reply. “The Chancellor of the Exchequer makes it plain that the taxable resources of this enormously wealthy country are not exhausted. He says; ‘I can find the money that it is necessary to find for the requirements and demands, present and future, of the country without resorting to customs duties levied upon necessities of life, upon things which men need in their daily life. I can do it without impeding the flow of British commerce, without interrupting the free exchange of commodities, without hampering and harassing the great industries of the country, and without putting British commerce once more in fetters and in chains. I propose to find the money, not by taxing men’s necessities, but by taxing their superfluities and their luxuries. I propose to find the money by taxing those who are well able to bear the burden; I propose to find the money by inviting modest contributions from those who are at the

present moment participating in what is truly a national property.' ”

And now for an expression from Mr. Balfour towards the end of the fight in November on the motion for the third reading of the Bill. “ We think that for an industrial community situated like ourselves in this modern world of ever-increasing invention and development; with numerous rivals around us as well equipped as ourselves, it is perfect madness to tamper, as the present Government are doing, with equality in the rights of property. It will destroy confidence, and with confidence you destroy enterprise. When you choose to establish a State in which neither enterprise nor confidence is required that is all right, but as long as you choose to carry on your system as it has always been carried on upon private enterprise and private initiative, so long you must make the rewards of private enterprise absolutely secure. You are not doing it; you are absolutely endangering it, in my judgment; without even attempting to provide any substitute for it. So far as my judgment goes you are doing the greatest injury which a Government can inflict upon a great industrial community like our own country; and you are making it ever more and more difficult for that competitive fight which is going to be the greatest feature of modern international politics.”

So the battle went on, leaders contending as to the expediency of Budget methods as well as to the Budget principles. While the New Liberals exalted the idealism of the Budget, and referred to the Conservatives' opposition to it as the selfish materialism which is only to be expected from those in the possession of the good things of life, the Conservatives made much of the sentimentality

of New Liberal ideas; and claimed that a Budget should be a practical businesslike affair which did not violently disturb the existing state of society.

The summer holidays of Parliament were thrown over in the excitement. The ship of the Budget was approaching unknown seas.

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CHAPTER V

THE LIMEHOUSE CAMPAIGN

THE House of Commons and the country were under the influence of Budget fever from April when Mr. Lloyd George first announced his proposals till December when the third reading of the Finance Bill containing the Budget in amended form was carried, and the measure was taken up to the House of Lords. The property-owning classes were agitated and angry, and "confiscation," "spoliation" and "robbery" became household words throughout the breadth and length of the land. The liquor trade was up in arms; wealthy City men united against the Chancellor's demand; and from the combined forces of a hundred interests there went up appeals to Heaven against the sacrilegious hand of the Chancellor. "Why penalise one class for the sake of another?" was asked. "Capital is bound to leave this country for abroad," declared hundreds of responsible men; "Undiluted Socialism," exclaimed another section; and historical students protested that the constitution was being violated by the revolutionary legislation which it was proposed to pass under cover of a finance measure. Not for long years had such hot wrath and such genuine wrath been manifested at a political scheme.

In the House of Commons the Conservatives, comparatively few in numbers, made themselves the standard-bearers of rebellion. If Mr. F. E. Smith was the political genius of the back benches, there were a number of very able and determined men to help in the fight. To say they helped is a very general term, because as a matter of fact a good many of the private members took turns in leading the attack, and were quite qualified to do so on particular occasions. There was for instance, Lord Robert Cecil, an acute and pertinacious lawyer ; Mr. Younger, a brewer and keen man of business ; Sir Frederick Banbury, a typical City financier ; Mr. Cave, a steady level-headed chairman of Quarter Sessions. Day after day, night after night, they maintained the war, fighting the Finance Bill line by line, word by word. The tension of those long drawn-out sittings, the frequent stirring passages, the hours of boredom, the legal disputations over verbal definitions, the fierce and violent denunciations sometimes from one side and sometimes from the other, made up a period of strain and endeavour which will never be forgotten by the longest-lived Parliament man of the day. As the summer came on and it was seen that there could be no rising of the House nor any regular holidays, the Liberal hosts were organised so that part of them could go away, and rest for a week or two, and then come back for the release of another batch of their colleagues. The Opposition force was far too small to admit of such an arrangement, and the Conservatives struggled on, day by day, not only through the normal time of a Parliamentary sitting, but on into the small hours, until the grey light of dawn stole through the painted windows. Hours of sleep were few for them. They never lost heart.

On the Government side many Ministers had to suffer the heat and burden of the fight ; chief among them, of course, being Mr. Lloyd George, for it was under his personal guidance that the measure had to be piloted through the tempestuous months. All the time he had to be in his place, defending his measure not only on broad principles, but clause by clause, paragraph by paragraph, and finally in minutest detail. During each of those long summer nights he would, perhaps, have to make a score of speeches. The pressure on him was tremendous. Sometimes at two o'clock or thereabouts his friend, Mr. Churchill, would take him out for a cup of coffee or a basin of bread-and-milk, but half an hour later the Chancellor would be back in his place relieving Mr. Haldane, Mr. Samuel, or whatever other Minister had temporarily taken command. Many are the summer mornings on which I have seen Mr. Lloyd George, after a tumultuous sitting, leave the House with his face ashy with fatigue, but nevertheless quite cheery in expression. The strain on a statesman in these circumstances is very great, and by some it is insupportable. Temperament, however, plays a great part in Parliamentary battles, and Mr. Lloyd George had other weapons besides fervour. His suavity, his trick of reasonableness, his flashes of humour did him good service in those troublous times.

Much of the storm which the Budget created in the country was naturally enough directed towards its author, and he was assailed from a hundred quarters. It was suggested not only that the "Welsh attorney" could not have the financial training necessary for a Chancellor of the Exchequer, but also that not having been born into

certain political and social circles he was unable to appreciate the feelings, desires and requirements of many of his countrymen. He was told quite plainly that his method of addressing public meetings was undignified, and it was distinctly hinted that he was not sufficiently gentlemanly for the high position he occupied. Personal attacks still stronger were made by a good many, and it was pretty generally agreed that he artfully tried to present his Budget as a fair one between all parties to his opponents in the House of Commons, and that outside among the poor he let himself go in the presentation of a highly coloured case in which the poverty-stricken were pitted against the rich. All kinds of motives were urged against him, personal vanity, the desire for applause, a natural impulse towards vulgarity, the lust of high office. The prejudice aroused by his proposals and later by the very mention of his name, was astounding even to some of those who did not entirely share his views. He had to encounter the conditions which surround all innovating statesmen to whatever school of thought they may belong. Among what are called the better classes of this country at certain periods of the Budget dispute, it was only necessary to mention the name "Lloyd George" to raise an atmosphere of virulence.

Mr. Lloyd George flung himself body, heart, and soul into the midst of the fight. The Budget was part of himself. He expounded it outside the House with all the force and vivacity which were in him. His lack of Cabinet reserve and so-called Ministerial dignity made his speeches extremely effective, but made them also extremely offensive to his powerfully placed opponents. "Vulgarity" was the favourite charge against him. Again and again

he was told that he was degrading his high office by personalities. His principal speech and the speech which called out most abuse was one delivered on July 30th at Limehouse. I propose to give a few typical extracts from it so that the reader may judge of the character and force of the man and may form an opinion as to the justice of the charges made against the Chancellor with regard to his language. Here, then, are the essential parts of the speech.

“ A few months ago a meeting was held not far from this hall in the heart of the City of London, demanding that the Government should launch into enormous expenditure on the Navy. That meeting ended up with the resolution promising that those who passed the resolution would give financial support to the Government in their undertaking. There have been two or three meetings held in the City of London since, attended by the same class of people, but not ending up with the resolution promising to pay. On the contrary, while we are spending the money they will not pay. What has happened since to alter their tone? Simply that we have sent in the bill. We started our four Dreadnoughts. They cost eight millions of money. We promised them four more; they cost another eight millions. Somebody has got to pay, and these gentlemen say, ‘ Perfectly true, somebody has got to pay, but we would rather that somebody was somebody else.’ We started building and we wanted money to pay for the building, so we sent the hat round. We sent it round amongst the workmen and the miners of Derbyshire and Yorkshire, the weavers of High Peak and the Scotsmen of Dumfries, who, like all their countrymen, know the value of money. They all brought in coppers. We went round

Belgravia, but there has been such a howl ever since that it has completely deafened us. They say, 'It is not so much the Dreadnoughts we object to, it is the old age pensions.' If they object to the pensions, why did they promise them? They won elections on the strength of their promises. It is true they never carried them out. Deception is always a pretty contemptible vice, but to deceive the poor is the meanest of all crimes. They say 'When we promised pensions we meant pensions at the expense of the people for whom they were provided. We simply meant to bring in a Bill to compel workmen to contribute to their own pensions.' If that is what they meant, why did they not say so?

"The Budget is introduced, not merely for the purpose of raising barren taxes, but taxes that are fertile taxes, taxes that will bring forth fruit—the security of the country which is paramount in the minds of all, provision for the aged and deserving poor—it was time it was done. It is rather a shame for a rich country like ours, probably the richest country in the world; if not the richest the world has ever seen, that it should allow those who have toiled all their days to end in penury and possibly starvation. It is rather hard that an old workman should have to find his way to the gates of the tomb, bleeding and footsore through the brambles and thorns of poverty. We cut a new path through, an easier one, a pleasanter one, through fields of waving corn. We are raising money to pay for the new road, aye and to widen it, so that two hundred thousand paupers shall be able to join in the march. There are many in the country blessed by Providence with great wealth, and if there are amongst them men who grudge out

of their riches a fair contribution towards the less fortunate of their fellow-countrymen, they are shabby rich men.

“ We propose to do more by the means of the Budget. We are raising money to provide against the evils and sufferings that follow from unemployment. We are raising money for the purpose of assisting our great friendly societies to provide for the sick, the widows and the orphans. We are providing money to enable us to develop the resources of our own land. I do not believe any fair-minded man would challenge the justice and the fairness of the objects which we have in view of raising this money. But there are some who say that the taxes themselves are unjust, unfair, unequal, oppressive, notably so the land taxes. They are engaged not merely in the House of Commons but outside the House of Commons in assailing these taxes with a concentrated and sustained ferocity which will not even allow a comma to escape with its life. Now are they really so wicked? I want to invite your attention to a number of concrete cases and fair samples to show you how our Budget proposals work. Let us take first of all the tax on undeveloped land and on increment. Not far from here not so many years ago, between the Lea and the Thames, you had hundreds of acres of land which was not even useful for agricultural purposes. In the main it was a sodden marsh. The commerce and trade of London increased under free trade, the tonnage of your shipping went up by hundreds of thousands of tons and by millions, labour was attracted from all parts of the country to help in the trade and business which was done here. What happened? There was no housing accommodation. This part of London became overcrowded and the population overflowed. That was the opportunity of

the owners of the marsh. All that land became valuable building land ; and land that used to be rented at £2 or £3 an acre has been selling within the last few years at £2000 an acre, £3000 an acre, £6000 an acre, £8000 an acre. Who created that increment ? Who made that golden swamp ? Was it the landlord ? Was it his energy ? Was it his brains, his forethought ? It was purely the combined efforts of all the people engaged in the trade and commerce of that part of London. The trader, the merchant, the shipowner, the dock labourer, the workman, everybody except the landlord. Now you follow that transaction. The land worth £2 or £3 an acre ran up to thousands. During the time it was ripening the landlord was paying his rates and his taxes not on £2 or £3 an acre. It was agricultural land, and because it was agricultural land a munificent Tory Government voted a sum of £2,000,000 to pay half the rates of those poor distressed landlords. You and I had to pay taxes in order to enable those landlords to pay half their rates on agricultural land while it was going up every year by hundreds of pounds from your efforts and the efforts of your neighbours. Well, now that is coming to an end. On the walls of Mr. Balfour's meeting last Friday were the words ' We protest against fraud and folly.' So do I. These things I am going to tell you of have only been possible up to the present through the fraud of the few and the folly of the million. In future those landlords will have to contribute to the taxation of the country on the basis of the real value, though only one halfpenny in the pound. And that is what all the howling is about."

After giving some more instances in support of his contentions, Mr. Lloyd George went on :—

“ Now all we say is this, ‘ In future you must pay one halfpenny in the pound on the real value of your land. In addition to that, if the value goes up not owing to your efforts (though if you spend money on improving it we will give you credit for it), if the value goes up owing to the industry and energy of the people living in that locality, one-fifth of that increment will in future be taken as the toll of the state.’ They say, ‘ Why should you tax this increment on landlords and not on other classes of the community.’ They say, ‘ You are taxing the landlord because the value of his property is going up through the growth of population with the increased prosperity of the community. Does not the value of a doctor’s business go up in the same way ? ’ Ha ! fancy comparing them for a moment. Who is the landlord ? The landlord is a gentleman (I have not a word to say about him in his personal capacity) who does not earn his wealth. He does not even take the trouble to receive his wealth. He has a host of agents and clerks that receive for him. He does not even take the trouble to spend his wealth. He has a host of people around him to do the actual spending for him. He never sees it until he comes to enjoy it. His sole function, his chief pride, is stately consumption of wealth produced by others.”

Dealing with the reversion tax, Mr. Lloyd George said :

“ The Gorringe case is a very familiar one. It was the case of the Duke of Westminster. Oh, these dukes, how they harass us ! Mr. Gorringe got a lease of the premises at a few hundreds a year for a ground rent. He built up a great business there. He was a very able business man, and when the end of the lease came he went to the Duke

of Westminster, and he said, 'Will you renew my lease? I want to carry on my business here.' He said, 'Oh yes, I will, but I do it on the condition that the few hundreds you pay a year for the ground rent shall in the future be £4000 a year.' In addition to that he had to pay a fine, a fine, mind you, of £50,000, and he had to build up huge premises at enormous expense according to plans submitted to the Duke of Westminster. All I can say is this, if it is confiscation and robbery for us to say to that duke, that being in need of money for public services we will take ten per cent., what will you call his taking the nine-tenths? These are the cases we have got to deal with. Look at this leasehold system. A case like this is not business, it is blackmail."

This was how Mr. Lloyd George summed up:—

"The other day at the great Tory meeting held at the Cannon Street Hotel, they had blazoned on the walls, 'We protest against the Budget in the name of democracy, liberty and justice.' Where does the democracy come in in this landed system? Where is the justice in all these transactions? We claim that the tax we impose on land is fair, just and moderate. They go on threatening that if we proceed they will cut down their benefactions and discharge labour. What kind of labour? What is the labour they are going to choose for dismissal? Are they going to threaten to devastate rural England while feeding themselves and dressing themselves? Are they going to reduce their gamekeepers? That would be sad. The agricultural labourer and the farmer might then have some part of the game which they fatten with their labour. But what would happen to you in the season? No week-end shooting with the Duke of Norfolk for any of us. But

that is not the kind of labour they are going to cut down. They are going to cut down productive labour—builders and gardeners—and they are going to ruin their property so that it shall not be taxed. All I can say is this. The ownership of land is not merely an enjoyment, it is a stewardship. It has been reckoned as such in the past; and if they cease to discharge their functions which include the security and defence of the country and the looking after the broken in their villages and neighbourhood, those functions which are part of the traditional duties attaching to the ownership of land and which have given to it its title, if they cease to discharge those functions, the time will come to reconsider the conditions under which land is held in this country. No country, however rich, can permanently afford to have quartered upon its revenue a class which declines to do the duty which it is called upon to perform. And therefore, it is one of the prime duties of statesmanship to investigate those conditions. But I do not believe it. They have threatened and menaced like that before. They see it is not to their interest to carry out these futile menaces. They are now protesting against paying their fair share of the taxation of the land, and they are doing so by saying, ‘You are burdening the community; you are putting burdens upon the people which they cannot bear.’ Ah; they are not thinking of themselves. Noble souls! It is not the great dukes they are feeling for; it is the market gardener, it is the builder, and it was until recently the small-holder. In every debate in the House of Commons they said, ‘We are not worrying for ourselves; we can afford it with our broad acres. But just think of the little man who has only got a few acres.’ And we were so very impressed with this tearful appeal that at last we

said, 'We will leave him out.' I almost expected to see Mr. Pretymen jump over the Table and say, 'Fall on my neck and embrace me.' Instead of that he stiffened up; his face wreathed with anger, and he said, 'The Budget is more unjust than ever.' Oh no; we are placing the burdens on the broad shoulders. Why should I put burdens on the people? I am one of the children of the people. I was brought up amongst them. I know their trials, and God forbid that I should add one grain of trouble to the anxiety which they bear with such patience and fortitude. When the Prime Minister did me the honour of inviting me to take charge of the national exchequer at a time of great difficulty, I made up my mind in framing the Budget which was in front of me, that at any rate no cupboard should be barer, no lot should be harder to bear. By that test I challenge them to judge the Budget."

That, I think, fairly represents the gist of Mr. Lloyd George's Budget speech which was so violently assailed on various grounds. He was attacked for setting class against class, for his personal references and allusions, for giving what were called misleading examples, and most of all for talking to the poor of Limehouse in the way which would appeal most effectively to the poor of a great city. It was certainly a new model of Cabinet oratory; and it only remains to be said that the New Liberals were delighted at the slaughter of harmless and ornamental platitude and the substitution of pungency and virility. That Cabinet reticence, grandiloquence and dignity were thrown to the winds troubled them not.

Practically every part of the Chancellor's speech was condemned by the critics. The passage in which he dealt with the Gorringe case was the subject of special comment;

and his presentment of the Duke of Westminster was stated to be entirely misleading. I give herewith an outline of the facts. A large business in the name of Mr. Gorringer was carried on at Buckingham Palace Road, in premises of which the Duke of Westminster was the ground landlord. Several shops had been united in the one establishment. The Duke of Westminster's annual receipts in ground rents from the Gorringer premises up till 1903 did not amount to more than £350. Nevertheless, Mr. Gorringer was paying annually £3665, the difference being accounted for by the fact that those who held the original leases from the Duke of Westminster were charging Mr. Gorringer something like the full value of the property and were making profits on the original transactions. When the Duke obtained possession again he charged a rental of £4000 instead of the £3665 previously paid to others by Mr. Gorringer, and thus secured for himself the value which had hitherto gone into the pockets of intermediaries. The point of Mr. Lloyd George's critics was that the rental was raised from a few hundreds to thousands not by the Duke but by others, and that the actual facts were obscured for the sake of harsh imputations against a wealthy landlord.

The position is set out with clearness in the prospectus of "Frederick Gorringer (Ltd.)," issued in July, 1903. Here is an extract :—

"The Company will take over the benefit of an agreement . . . made between the ground landlord and Mr. D. W. Butterfield on behalf of the company for the grant, for a term of 63 years from the 25th March, 1903, of a new lease of the premises now in the occupation of vendor, and also of the four valuable shops Nos. 61, 63, 65 and 67,

Buckingham Palace Road, possession of which will be given in April, 1907. The last-named premises are not at present occupied by the vendor, but are in the centre of, and will complete the frontage of the entire block. The premises now in occupation of vendor will be leased at a rental of £4000 per annum (being £335 per annum more than the rent now paid by the business), and the additional premises at a rental of £1200 per annum, in consideration of a premium in respect of all the premises of £50,000 to be paid by the company to the ground landlord, and of the company undertaking to remodel part of the premises at a cost of £50,000. The company have the option given to them by the ground landlord to take a lease for 80 years in lieu of the above term of 63 years on their undertaking to rebuild, before the 25th March, 1909, such portions of the premises as have not recently been rebuilt by the vendor, at a cost of a further sum not to be more than £80,000. . . . The acquisition of the valuable additional shops in the centre of the frontage in Buckingham Palace Road, possession of which the company will obtain in March, 1907, and the rebuilding of the premises, will give a largely increased floor and window space, which should produce a considerable increase of profits. . . .”

The facts being published by opponents, Mr. Lloyd George replied to his critics in a letter to the *Times*. He stated that the official record showed that up till 1903

“ The Duke of Westminster has been receiving in ground rents from the Gorringe premises a total sum which did not exceed £350 per annum, and that the new arrangements comprised : (1) A new ground rent of £4000 per annum for the site of the old premises ; (2) A separate ground rent of £1200 per annum for the site of four additional buildings ; (3) A cash fine of £50,000 in respect of the whole transaction ; (4) An undertaking to remodel part of the premises at a further cost of £50,000.”

Mr. Lloyd George concluded as follows :—

“ I am aware that the prospectus issued by ‘ Frederick Gorringe, Ltd.’ in July, 1903, contains the words ‘ the Premises now in occupation of vendor will be leased at a rental of £4000 per annum (being £335 per annum more than the rent now paid by the business).’ I have nothing to do with the business arrangements of Messrs. Gorringe. I merely wished in my speech at Limehouse to call attention to the fact that the Duke of Westminster’s receipts from these ground rents rose on renewal of the leases from £350 to £4000 per annum; not to mention the other considerations enumerated above.”

One of those who entered the lists against the Budget was Lord Rosebery, who within the past fifteen years had been Liberal Prime Minister and leader of the progressive forces. Since the split between himself and Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman he had been separating himself farther and farther from the opinions of his old party, until at last during the Budget fight he definitely joined hands with the Conservatives against the Government. His support was naturally received with enthusiasm, and all his utterances were heralded as from a prophet. He spoke at Glasgow in September, and his speech was joyfully acclaimed by the followers of Mr. Balfour in every part of the land. Here are the concluding sentences of that speech :

“ I wish to speak with restraint, as I speak with regret; though there is little left for one in my position but the melancholy and unpopular privilege of telling what he believes to be true. I think my friends are moving on the path that leads to Socialism. How far they are advanced on that path I will not say, but on that path, I, at any rate,

cannot follow them an inch. Any form of Protection is an evil, but Socialism is the end of all, the negation of faith; of family property, of monarchy, of empire. And so with real sorrow I find in it the parting of the ways, and I myself must go a different road, the road of public economy, of strengthening not weakening character, of propping not undermining public confidence; and in doing so I shall preserve as my poor consolation the recollection that it is the way on which we built up the strength of our nation; the strength of our commerce, our greatness and our dominion."

The strength and practicability of the Budget proposals; rejoiced in by the one party, passionately criticised by the other, were responsible for an eddying storm over all the country, a storm which stirred up the fiercest prejudices, and was the cause of those gusts of personal offensiveness with which intense feeling is occasionally accompanied even in a land where political amenities are a national possession. Progressives saw their ship coming to port at last; Conservatives saw the beginning of Socialism bringing wreck and disaster to a social system, which, with all its defects, might well be the pride of the world. The Budget had carried Liberal politics from the dream-sphere to the sphere of reality, and earnest Conservatives saw that reality threatening the happiness of the country. We should not have been a fighting people with the instincts of our race strong within us if such a state of affairs had not resulted in some vindictiveness and high temper.

CHAPTER VI

THE EPISODE OF THE LORD ADVOCATE

WHEN political passion on some particular issue is sweeping the country for a period of months, there are certain to be emergent incidents which bring individual leaders face to face in a state of tension. The most astonishing personal incident of 1909 was the duel between Mr. Ure, the Lord Advocate for Scotland, and Mr. Balfour.

Mr. Ure was a genial keen Scots lawyer who never pressed forward very much in the House of Commons, but who when the battle was joined in the country proved to be one of the best Liberal platform fighters the party ever had. Tall and big-boned was Mr. Ure, with bare shaven face seared by lines of thought, with great straight mouth telling of strength and sensitiveness, with reflective eyes that lightened now and then with a glint of kindly humour, and with an astounding Scots accent which salted all his speeches.

Mr. Ure in the Budget fight was a tower of strength. As one who had never heard him on the platform, I was surprised to learn how much effect he had on audiences, how keenly he was sought after in the constituencies. It was obvious the Conservatives soon recognised what a damaging force he was, because when they noticed

what they considered to be unfair in his speeches there was a great outcry. His utterances, it was said, were not characterised by that undeviating regard for truth which each party in turn claims for itself. In common with most other people I never saw the first person reports of Mr. Ure's speeches in the provinces, but judging from the abbreviated accounts which were published in the London papers, he appears to have indicated that the old people of the country had some foundation for fears that they might lose the old age pensions if the Conservatives came into power. Conservatives protested vehemently against this. Whatever their attitude had been on the Old Age Pensions Bill when it had been before Parliament, whatever alterations they desired to make in it during its passage, they were none the less bound by the measure now that it had become law, they said. Old age pensions were as safe under them as under the Liberals. With Scots pertinacity Mr. Ure went on making speeches. Some of the more moderate Liberals shrugged their shoulders when reports of Mr. Ure's speeches continued to appear. Here is what the Liberal *Westminster Gazette* said on October 22nd :

“ The Liberal Party has an excellent case to put before the electors as to old age pensions, and we confess that we very much regret to see it compromised by the lines which Mr. Ure is taking in apparently every speech he makes.”

A flood of abuse descended on Mr. Ure from pretty well every quarter. This is an extract from *The World*, and is typical of the kind of comment which was going on in Conservative circles :

“ Some unkind persons have compared Mr. Ure with

the well-known early Christian whose terminological inexactitudes with regard to a transaction in real estate brought him and his faithful wife to a bad end. But the comparison is very unfair. Ananias really owned the estate; he was not a tenant. He really sold it; he was not compensated for disturbance. He really brought part of the money to the apostles for Church purposes, and his only lie was that he said he had brought the whole. His lie was merely to gain cheap credit for himself. It was not intended to stir up envy and hatred against others. Comparing the statements of Ananias and Sapphira with those made by Mr. Ure about the late Duke of Buccleugh and the Embankment, how trivial are the mis-statements of the pair! And yet misguided persons call Mr. Ure 'Ananias.' When will this slander of the dead stop?

"It may appear like party bias
To bracket Ure with Ananias,
But Ananias, I am sure
Kept nearer to the truth than Ure."

Mr. Balfour, whose careful avoidance of invective had always been an admirable feature of his parliamentary leadership, was led to attack the Lord Advocate with a severity which had gone out of fashion in modern times. No one has ever denied the Conservative leader a high sense of personal honour; and I believe he was deeply stirred by what he considered to be the continued and deliberate perversions of the truth by Mr. Ure. On October 26th, he made a speech at the Junior Constitutional Club, and in that speech he said things about Mr. Ure which made the ears of every Ministerialist tingle. The Press was invited by Mr. Balfour's own desire to hear the speech, so there could be no doubt as to the carefulness of his words. Here are a few extracts from this remarkable delivery.

"I do not wish to judge too harshly of expressions of an excited orator talking to an excited audience.

"It is the frigid and calculated lie which moves my indignation. I really think that a more scandalous dereliction of duty than that which the present holder of the office (Lord Advocate) has been guilty of has never been seen in politicians of his eminence.

"He has gone on either by direct statements or by unmistakable suggestions repeating a calumny which he must have known was a calumny, to audience after audience, where there might be some person who did not know what he knew. He has committed in that a double crime.

"If that extraordinary exercise of mendacious imagination has any effect with regard to the people to whom he is speaking, and, of course, he intends it to have some effect, what about the pain and anxiety which in the interests of a political movement he is inflicting upon the most helpless and deserving of the community?

"I remember writing a letter couched in unmistakable terms which said among other things that no Government could, if it would, interfere with these old age pensions, and that you might as well think of repudiating your obligations to the national credit as of repudiating your obligations to these recipients of national bounty.

"I cannot imagine a crime from which anybody who really understood the interests of freedom; of constitutional government would shrink more, than a crime which the Lord Advocate, as far as I can understand his speeches, has been deliberately guilty of; guilty, not once, not twice, but many times, guilty after warning, guilty with knowledge, guilty with all the facts of his statements

before him; guilty with a deliberate object, the deliberate object of perverting public opinion by spreading broadcast public calumny."

"I confess I am sorry the Lord Advocate is a Scotsman. He has dishonoured the profession to which he belongs, he has dishonoured the office which he holds; and he has dishonoured the country in which he was born."

Great was the sensation caused by Mr. Balfour's speech, and vast numbers of people who had known but little of the old age pensions controversy till that moment were impressed by the Conservative leader's words. Tens of thousands of Liberals were made uncomfortable; for they felt that a statesman of Mr. Balfour's scruples in personal matters would never go to the length of the words he had uttered unless there was really very substantial reason for them. And so politicians on both sides and the country at large waited for Mr. Ure to make his reply. That he would make a reply there could be no doubt, because Mr. Ure had a good deal of the dour Scots spirit which would certainly not submit calmly to any kind of personal attack, much less to an attack such as that of Mr. Balfour's. Moreover, as was demonstrated later, the Lord Advocate with all his individual forcefulness was an extremely sensitive man, and the last to pass over a suggestion against his good name.

Mr. Ure's answer, with the thrilling scene which accompanied it, took place in the House of Commons on November 3rd, a week after Mr. Balfour's speech. The opportunity was given by the third reading debate on the Finance Bill. Every one knew that Mr. Ure was to speak, and it had been arranged on the Conservative side that Mr.

F. E. Smith should follow him in order to rub in Mr. Balfour's criticisms. Soon after dinner-time, and while the House was gradually filling up, Mr. Ure and Mr. Balfour were to be seen in their places on the respective Front Benches, separated only by the Table of the House. Ex-Ministers were seated near Mr. Balfour, who looked in his blandest mood. Mr. Ure on the other side of the Table seemed to me almost a pathetic figure. The Prime Minister and the leading members of the Government had not yet returned from dinner, and except for the company of one or two Under Secretaries, he sat alone, with his head dropped thoughtfully forward, his hands linked nervously in his lap. His attitude was that of one worried by far-off things. The Liberals on the benches had a depressing realisation of him as a man with little or no case, who had to encounter a relentless and extremely skilful prosecutor. As he sat huddled up on the Treasury Bench there was about him the suggestion of the criminal in the dock, guilty and almost friendless; and on the whole Ministerialists felt that one of their champions, a little shame-faced and somewhat discredited, was about to put in a plea which would probably be unconvincing. The Conservatives on the other hand were quietly exultant. The drubbing which Mr. Balfour had given to a Minister—justified in the eyes of the country—was now to receive its final emphasis in the House of Commons; and Mr. F. E. Smith ran his eye over his notes with the keenness of the Old Bailey counsel who is thoroughly well aware of the strength of his case against the scoundrel he is going to prosecute.

Mr. Rowland Hunt, a Conservative, who had been speaking on the Finance Bill, sat down after an oration

to which an expectant House had paid little attention. Mr. Ure uncoiled himself and stepped to the Table.

"The Lord Advocate," announced the Speaker.

A nervous silence fell on all the House. Curiosity, condemnation; sympathy, all were in that silence. The Liberals hoped that their representative would make a better case than they anticipated; Conservatives braced themselves to punish to the bitter end the unworthy Minister who had already been flagellated by Mr. Balfour. Quietly Mr. Ure began. He was without notes, and he clasped his hands behind his back and turned in the direction of the Speaker.

"The fact that I stand at this Table to-night I welcome with deep gratitude as evidence of the conviction of my colleagues on this Bench that I am not unworthy to continue to hold office and to remain a member of this House, and that my advocacy of this Bill has not been characterised by the use of any arguments calculated to bring disgrace on my upbringing, my office or my native country." These few words delivered in measured way, had a note which went straight to the nerves of all the members. Something in the manner of the man told the Commons plainly that here was one who intended to take no insult lying down. Before Mr. Ure had been speaking five minutes, members were hurrying in from the lobbies and smoking-rooms, all of them apprised of the fact that a great parliamentary scene was at hand.

With studied deliberation and naturalness of tone the Lord Advocate went on to support the Budget proposals, and presently he came to what every one was waiting for, namely the explanation of what he had said at the various meetings of the country. "I have said that if

this Budget were passed by; and if this Government were overthrown; I doubted the ability of the party opposite to raise the money necessary to pay pensions to the aged poor by the one and only method that they had ever suggested that money could be raised. That is a scrupulously accurate statement of the argument."

Mr. Asquith and other Ministers had come in by this time, and the House was crowded in every part. Not varying the pace of his words but unconsciously deepening their note, Mr. Ure went on to contrast the rival methods of raising money for national purposes, that is to say, by the Budget on the one hand, and by Tariff Reform on the other. There became obvious a certain slow anger in the man that affected the House very much. It was rousing the luke-warm Liberals, putting a rage of sympathy into the few stalwarts who had always defended the Lord Advocate, and setting loose rumblings and mutterings amongst the Conservatives. Mr. Ure paid as little heed to one manifestation as to the other. He was there to show his argument was right, but he was there before everything to clear his character. With lucidity and in deliberate pursuance of a speech which had evidently been carefully thought out beforehand, he made it clear that the third-person reports of his speeches which had appeared in the newspapers did not represent his full meaning. It was with a slow gesture of hand and wrist in the direction of Mr. Balfour that he indicated he was going to carry the war into the enemy's country. "In May, 1908, there took place a very notable bye-election in North Shropshire, and there appeared in the columns of the *Times* on May 14th, 1908, a telegram in these terms :

" " Those who have hitherto doubted the value of

our fiscal policy must now be converted to its wisdom; for though the Radicals have promised old age pensions only the Unionists can provide for their payment.' ”

“ Name; name,” cried Ministerialists, anticipating the climax.

“ That telegram,” said Mr. Ure, “ came from none other than the leader of the Opposition.”

A tremendous shout went up from the Liberal hosts. Here was revenge indeed. The man who had accused another of falsity because he had denied that opponents could not or would not give old age pensions had himself said that the Radicals had promised old age pensions while the Unionists were the only people who could pay them. The combined forces of Ministerialists rocked with joy and excitement. Mr. Balfour flushed a little. In the midst of a hundred cries Mr. Dillon's voice rang out.

“ A cold and calculated lie ! ” he exclaimed.

Instantly the Speaker was up. “ I cannot allow an expression of that sort.”

“ I withdraw it,” said Mr. Dillon, “ but I only follow the example of Mr. Balfour. I apologise and withdraw.”

“ I accept the withdrawal of the honourable gentleman,” said Mr. Speaker, “ but he did not make it better by what he added.”

“ I withdraw and apologise, and I hope the right honourable gentleman will follow suit,” said Mr. Dillon.

“ The honourable gentleman knows very well,” said the Speaker, “ that certain things are permissible outside this House—— ”

“ This is the place to make them,” interrupted Mr. Patrick O'Brien.

THE EPISODE OF THE LORD ADVOCATE

"But are not permissible within these walls," continued the Speaker.

"I apologise and withdraw," said Mr. Dillon.

But there could be no doubt that he had voiced the mastering feeling of the great bulk of members. Gone now was any indifference. The parts had been changed and the Minister was no longer the prisoner in the dock; he was the accuser, and Mr. Balfour was the accused.

Mr. Ure's blistering words, the resentment which oozed from him, were rousing all the Government men in strange manner. Rarely has there been such a transformation in the House of Commons. Mr. Balfour obviously felt it. His face was set firm, his cheeks maintained unusual colour. Opposite to him Mr. Asquith and other Ministers were all showing signs of their excitement.

It is impossible to describe adequately the acridity and scorn in the next few sentences of Mr. Ure. "I suppose," he said, "that the right honourable gentleman intended this telegram to reach the aged voters of North Shropshire, and to convey to them the message that their chance of obtaining a pension in their old age was contingent upon the chops and changes of party warfare. I suppose that the message was intended to raise doubts and apprehensions in these old folks' minds as to whether the Prime Minister of England would keep his promise. If those doubts were raised and those old folks entertained those doubts; would not Mr. Balfour have the courage to go on a public platform to say that he shared those doubts of the aged poor in North Shropshire about the ability of the Prime Minister to provide the pensions? Is that licensed calumny? Is that a double crime? Is that a cold and calculated lie?"

“Did the man who said that bring disgrace upon his upbringing; upon his high position, upon his native country? I should not have thought so. I should have thought that that was perfectly fair controversy. If I believed that old age pensions could only be financed by Tariff Reform, I should have thought myself perfectly justified in saying so, and challenging the ability of any man to pay the pensions if he was relying exclusively on free trade finance.”

With facts and figures Mr. Ure bent himself to the task of showing that Tariff Reform “would never come near reaching the yield of money necessary for the purpose of paying those pensions.” He went a step further. He assumed Tariff Reform to be immediately resolved upon; and then asked what length of time would elapse before the duties could be collected; and he took the necessary preparations for the inauguration of Tariff Reform down to the year 1915. “I ventured therefore to inquire very humbly what about old age pensions? The House will gather that that very interesting chain of reasoning was entirely suppressed. I was represented as having said that if my political opponents came into office that they would repudiate the obligation of paying old age pensions; that they would repeal the Act; that the old age pensioners would be deprived of their money of set purpose by honourable gentlemen opposite.” The Lord Advocate turned towards the Speaker, and his voice rose to a hoarse shrillness. “Sir, I have never said anything of the kind.” The Liberals; the Labour men; the Nationalists swayed in their seats with excitement, volleyed cheer after cheer. The picture of this gaunt Scotsman battling for his honour had brought to the surface elemental feelings which are

not often displayed unrestrainedly within the walls of Westminster. Rage at Mr. Balfour's words; rage at the very sight of him sitting facing Mr. Ure, pale, determined and silent, anger and detestation of followers behind him who had backed his words, perhaps a touch of indignation with themselves for having even for one moment felt a coldness towards this impassioned figure at the Table; all these feelings leaped forth not only in the cheers, but in the quivering silences that lay between. A strong man defending his good name is always one of the great sights. When, as in the case of Mr. Ure, that revolt of feeling is able to reveal itself by means of an eloquence which has previously been comparatively unknown to his hearers; the effect is such as to stir the calmest and to move even the cynic. The Lord Advocate's words at first had interested members, had rapidly convinced them of his sincerity; and had then placed the man who had called him liar in a position which any person of delicate feeling would strive hard to avoid. It was impossible not to sympathise a little with Mr. Balfour as he sat white and rigid on the Opposition Bench; impossible not to understand, when one of his colleagues ventured a word and was waved aside with a quick petulant movement of the hand. As for the great body of the Conservatives the more sensitive of them were undoubtedly a little shocked by Mr. Ure's speech. Mr. F. E. Smith, papers in hand; seated just behind Mr. Balfour, received one or two whispered words flung back at him by his leader, and then let his papers fall negligently upon his knees; he would have no need of them that night.

The House was seething—there was no other word for it—when Mr. Ure approached the end of his speech,

The Scotsman had roused his fellow-members, and what is more he had roused himself, and though his words had never lost their ordered sequence, and rarely rose above the tone necessary to make them audible in that crowded assembly, they rang with a pride and scorn which went straight to the hearts of the excited men who were listening. "I hate to have made such a speech as I have inflicted on this House, so full of the first personal pronoun; but the House will, I think, recognise that in the present circumstances I was compelled, because if charges such as these which have been preferred against me had a vestige of foundation, then my continuance in my profession, in my office, and in my place in this House would be plainly impossible."

Towards the end his words came faster; and the veins stood out in his forehead. He was flaming at the actual finish. He bent across the Table towards Mr. Balfour with his eyes alight. "Accusations such as these happily find no parallel in the history of this country since the days when it was open to a man to defend an attack upon his honour with his own right arm."

He sank back into his seat beside the Prime Minister, while the lines of Ministerialists cheered him almost hysterically. Hardly a man in that assembly but must have felt that rightly or wrongly the speech had put Mr. Balfour into an ignominious position. The flushed faces of Ministers as they leaned forward to give their congratulations to Mr. Ure told of the spirit of the House. In the midst of all this there was a demonstration of courage only to be expected from a man of the calibre of Mr. Balfour. He had stopped Mr. F. E. Smith from speaking in order

that he might speak himself. He rose to the Table amid a howl of fury from the Liberals.

"I hope the House will recognise that in rising at once to deal with——"

"You can do nothing else," came lashingly from the Liberals. But Mr. Balfour was not a man to be frightened even in such a scene as was presented by the House at that moment. He pushed on steadily, in spite of frequent interruptions, which were at times overwhelming. His manner was entirely unprovocative, but he nevertheless maintained in effect his contentions in respect to the Lord Advocate's speeches. At intervals the Speaker had to exercise all his authority to secure a hearing for the Opposition leader, for the Ministerialists were infuriated when they recognised that he was to persist in his charges. It was, however, impossible for him to dissipate the effect created by Mr. Ure's explanation. Directly Mr. Balfour sat down; Mr. Asquith rose.

"I confess I hoped that Mr. Balfour was going to fulfil what was almost the universal expectation in every quarter of the House after the convincing, dignified, and simple statement of the Lord Advocate of his case—to express his regret that in a moment of hot and unusual excitement he was betrayed into making charges which it was absolutely impossible to substantiate. My right honourable friend in his speech—which will live in our annals as one of the finest and most dignified vindications of personal honour and political consistency—my right honourable friend has repudiated, disproved and discredited the outrageous suggestions that have been made against his personal honour and character. I venture to say to him and to say it in the name of the vast majority

of this House to-night that he leaves its precincts with the honour and confidence of his colleagues and his fellow-men."

A tumult of cries swept the Ministerialist Benches. Scores of members loudly demanded that Mr. Balfour should withdraw his words. "Balfour; Balfour," they chorussed insistently. The Conservative leader paid no heed to them. And then the House was adjourned; and the members poured out into the lobbies and the corridors talking excitedly of the most moving speech that Parliament had known for years.

CHAPTER VII

THE CHANGING DRAMA

THAT the devastating Budget should become law was inconceivable to the majority of the Conservatives of the country, and as the determination of the Government to maintain the essentials of Mr. Lloyd George's scheme became manifest, and it was seen that the gallant fight of the small minority in the Commons would be unavailing there was a cry throughout the country for the assistance of the House of Lords. The Upper Chamber was the second line of defence, a line of defence believed to be impregnable. The Peers were not the kind of men to be withered into activity by Mr. Lloyd George's caustic tongue, not the men to be bullied by Mr. Asquith. That was the feeling. "The House of Lords does not touch money bills," proclaimed the Liberals, "and it dare not touch this." But they knew that Conservatism was desperate. They knew that the Lords might find at least apparently reasonable grounds for wrecking the Budget, and though they professed the utmost confidence and waved aside the suggestion of interference by the Lords, it is easy now to see that the possibility had to be taken into account. It stands to the prescience of Mr. Asquith that he took it into account, and laid his plans to meet it.

That the course of the story should be understood it is necessary to explain the relative position of the Peers and Commons with regard to the raising of money by taxes. One of the principal functions of the House of Commons is to provide money for the use of the State, and the fact that the Commons are chosen by the people who have to pay the taxes gives at once the reason why the Commons rather than the Lords have control of the national purse. As long ago as the fourteenth century in the time of Richard II. it became the practice "that all grants should be made by the Commons with the advice and assent of the Lords." Sir William Anson in his "Law and Custom of the Constitution" relates how some years later Henry IV. unwittingly over-rode the privileges of the Commons, with the result that the House remonstrated and made it clear that the grant was theirs. Through the centuries the Commons insisted on their right in this direction. In July, 1678, when Charles II. was King, the Commons formally declared that all bills granting "aids and supplies" to the Crown—that is to the State—should have their origin in the House of Commons, and ought not to be changed or altered by the House of Lords. There was always, however, the rather grudging admission that the Lords might reject a money bill in its entirety even though they could not alter it. But this power was qualified for continuing generations by the practice (since changed) of formulating different bills for different taxes or sets of taxes. Thus it would have been within the legal power of the Lords to have rejected a money bill relating to one tax; and the rejection would not have affected the other taxes. It has to be borne in mind, however, that the Commons were

increasingly jealous of the Lords' interference with money bills in any way. This was the state of things up till 1860. In that year Mr. Gladstone among other measures brought in a bill to repeal the paper duties. The Lords were opposed to it. They took their courage in both hands, and using their right of rejection threw out the bill. There was a storm of protest. The Commons on July 6th, 1860, passed a series of resolutions of which this was one :—

“ That although the Lords have exercised the power of rejecting bills of several descriptions relative to taxation by negating the whole, yet the exercise of that power by them has not been frequent, and is justly regarded by this House with peculiar jealousy as affecting the right of the Commons to grant the supplies and to provide the ways and means for the service of the year.”

But Mr. Gladstone was not content with this formal affirmation. In the next year he took action with a view to making it practically impossible for the Lords to exercise their legal right of throwing out a money bill relating to a single tax. He put all the taxes of the year into one bill, so that the Lords—admittedly unable to alter the measure—would have to accept it or reject it altogether. That they should throw out all the taxes of the year was in any circumstances unbelievable. This is what Lord Morley says about the episode in his “ Life of Gladstone ”: “ Until now the practice had been to make the different taxes the subject of as many different bills, thus placing it in the power of the Lords to reject a given tax bill without throwing the financial machinery wholly out of gear. By including all the taxes in a single Finance Bill the power of the Lords to over-ride the other

House was effectually arrested." Lord Morley's words were published in 1903 : in 1909 the Lords, quite unafraid of the history of the past, were very seriously considering the advisability of throwing out not one tax, but all the taxes of the year, and in addition the complicated financial arrangements bound up with the periodical adjustment of taxes. Never before had it been done, but never before had there been such a Chancellor of the Exchequer as Mr. Lloyd George, and most of the Lords were inclined to take for their motto Montaigne's words : " For a desperate disease a desperate cure."

As the time approached for the third reading of the Finance Bill in the Commons and its transit to the Upper Chamber, there was much conjecture as to what the Lords would do. " They will reject it outright," said the more ardent ; " look at the licensing proposals, at the new taxation on land, at the new Domesday Book, these are things which each require separate legislation and which are in no proper sense integral parts of the Finance Bill. Certainly the Lords will reject it altogether."

" No," said another group ; " the Lords will pass the second reading of the measure, and they will amend it in the committee stage, taking out these revolutionary proposals."

" That will be equal to rejection," retorted the New Liberals.

A babel of demands and defiances ascended from both sides, and presently from amid the prognostications, arguments and maledictions, one thing at least became clear, and this was that the Lords would not pass the Budget as it went up to them. The feelings of the influential classes in the country were deeply engaged, and the

majority of the obscurer peers; the "backwoodsmen" as they came to be called, faithfully represented in their outcries a very large, a very powerful and a very angry section of the community. It cannot be doubted that at this stage the wiser among the Conservatives, notably Mr. Balfour and Lord Lansdowne, saw the coming of danger in the uncompromising demand for the destruction of the Budget. Much as they disliked its provisions, yet they could not shut their eyes to the greater peril which loomed ahead for Conservatism if the Lords in their hatred of Mr. Lloyd George's ideas killed the Budget of the year. The constitutional arguments to be advanced in respect of the Lords' power to interfere in financial matters would be serious, and would undoubtedly be pressed for all they were worth, but this did not blind Conservative leaders to the prospect—already perceived by the Chancellor of the Exchequer—of a campaign against the Peers for destroying proposals to tax the upper classes for the benefit of the lower classes. Here was a deadly weapon. It might be and indeed probably would be used not only to pass the Budget in the face of the Lords, but to take away some if not all of the Lords' powers. If this should prove to be the course of the demagogic Chancellor of the Exchequer, then, indeed, would it be better and safer for Conservatism temporarily to acquiesce in taxation proposals which could be modified in years to come rather than by defiance to invite the crushing-in of the bulwarks of Conservatism. Allow the powers of the Lords to be mutilated, and where would be the safeguards of the constitution against the violent action of a Radical House of Commons, elected by the country in an impulsive passing mood?

But the tide of events was too strong for the Conservative chiefs. Humiliation and a break-up of political power would certainly have followed if Lord Lansdowne, reluctantly endorsing the second reading of the Finance Bill, had been deserted by the rank and file of the Peers. And so, whatever their personal forebodings may have been, the leaders were driven to a bold course.

There was much excitement in the House of Commons when the third reading of the Bill was passed on the night of November 4th. The figures were :—

For the Bill	..	..	..	..	379
Against the Bill	..	..	..	..	149

When the result of the voting was announced, the Ministerialists roared their congratulations to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, and as the House broke up he was the centre of groups of supporters who were patting him on the back and shaking him by the hand in token of their pride in him. That was in the glow of the moment. Next morning there burst forth streams of comment as to what the Lords would do with the Bill. The New Liberals kept their courage up by continuing to declare that the Peers dared not interfere with a Finance Bill, but there was a cold feeling at their hearts.

The first definite indication of the course of events was forthcoming in a Conservative daily paper on November 12th. The commencing sentence in its most prominent column was as follows :—"That the House of Lords will refuse its assent to the Budget until the opinion of the country has been taken is now certain." Four days later all doubt was scattered. On November 16th; Lord Lansdowne gave notice in the House of Lords that

when the Finance Bill came on for Second Reading, he would move—

“ That this House is not justified in giving its assent to this Bill until it has been submitted to the judgment of the country.”

That notice of motion opened a fresh stage of the great drama. The New Liberals' disappointment at the now inevitable defeat of their cherished Budget was tempered by stern exultation at the knowledge that at last there was to be the opportunity of coming to grips with the Peers.

The upper classes found it hard to realise that it was even possible for them to be beaten by Mr. Lloyd George, did not believe it to be a feasible proposition that the great mass of the prosperous well-to-do men, who had inherited vast domains and were demigods in the countryside, men whose material welfare, brought about in many cases by the exercise of their own great qualities, was the basis of the nation's individuality—that these men could possibly be vanquished by an army drawn to some extent from the middle classes, but very largely from the poorer classes, led by a visionary demagogue like the Chancellor of the Exchequer. It is clear now that they did not comprehend the strength of the force opposed to them, did not understand the essentials of that strength. The extremists who honestly thought that Mr. Lloyd George's utterances were cant, that his arguments were dishonest, that his Limehouse speech and other speeches were plausibilities intended to delude the poor, were blinding themselves to some of the facts. They were naturally enough prejudiced against Mr. Lloyd George—as Liberals a generation before had been prejudiced against Mr.

Joseph Chamberlain ; but they made the great and vital mistake of under-rating their chief opponent, under-rating his motives first of all, but more important still in the situation of the moment, under-rating his strategy and foresight.

Those politicians who are opposed to violent change often drift into an opposition of change which is not violent ; and they become unable to recognise the vague, sometimes inarticulate, but nevertheless unmistakable tendency of the community at varying periods to take fresh steps towards those fields which two or three generations of spreading thought have made to appear desirable. Of course, the downright partisans on each side do not worry about the fine shades ; the broad effect is enough for them ; they follow undeviatingly the call of their commanders ; and the objectionable personality of their chief enemies is far more potent than the noblest of their own professed ideals. The Conservative party at this time was no exception to the general rule. A real and thoughtful devotion to general interests was united with the vehement prejudices which no party can escape, and the combination made up a mighty agency for war.

The stalwarts in the Lords and the class they represented in the country held the belief strong as religion that the progress of the ideas of Mr. Lloyd George must be stopped at any cost. They failed to understand that among the bulk of the common people—people who called themselves Conservative as well as Liberal—there was then existing that periodic impulse for some change towards the improvement of happiness among the less fortunate ranks and the general amelioration of social conditions, to which all parties at all times pay lip service.

They failed, too, to recognise the full extent of the disadvantage of their position as the defenders of a system under which they were enjoying the material things of life from which those to whom they appealed were largely shut out. They failed, moreover, to realise the calibre of the statesman with whom they were face to face. In spite of all, there was something British and admirable about the attitude of the Lords and their party. They were at war for old established things, and whatever the arguments for change, the glory of our country has been built up through the centuries, and with all our tardiness we have made more progress in our slow way than some peoples with all their breakneck haste. The strength with which we have faced the world has always had among its factors a certain stolidity and an obstinacy against hurry. Whatever may have been the faults of the Conservative campaign (and, if you like, the errors of policy) there was much to stir the feelings in the sight of this tremendous section of national thought, buttressed by tradition and sentiment, embattled to withstand encroachments.

The House of Lords presented one of its most elaborate tableaux when, on November 22nd, it assembled to begin the six days' discussion on the general principles of the Finance Bill. Every one knew the result would be the rejection of the Bill, but Liberals, high-strung, were angrily desirous to know the reasons which were to be put forward for an action which in one direction or another was to make a mark on our constitution; and there was above all the moving historical interest of a combat to the death between the Peers and the Commons. In effect the Lords were saying, "Yes, we admit that

you members of the House of Commons are elected while we are not elected, and we admit that you have passed this Budget by a large majority, but we claim that the proposals in this Budget would not meet with the agreement of the larger number of the people who sent you to Westminster, and therefore we feel justified in holding it up until the electors have been consulted."

"In other words," scoffed the Commons in reply, "you mean that under cover of your pious wish to consult the people you intend to throw out a Bill which you believe affects injuriously the class you represent. If you succeed in upholding your contention that the rejection of a Budget is part of your functions, the dominance of the Lords over the House of Commons is established for ever, and the history of England is overthrown."

The crowded House of Lords at half-past four on the afternoon of November 22nd, impressed one with the indefinable message conveyed by some great historical painting. The completeness of the Chamber and its spirit: the covered Throne, the subdued richness of oak and bronze, the flashes of scarlet and gold; the closely packed ranks of Peers with their traditional restraint of manner and pose; the royalties and the ambassadors from other nations looking down from the galleries, the Cabinet Ministers from the Commons assembled in eager listening attitude on the steps of the Throne; and above everything the intangible suggestion of the great past in the Chamber and its environment—all combined to produce an effect which could be felt by any person of sensibility whatever his politics. The narrow galleries round three sides of the House were taken up by Peeresses bearing the names of famous families, all eager to witness the

stand being made by their husbands. Here and there among the ladies were men of royal blood. King Manoel; so soon to be deposed from his throne in Portugal, was present, his face alight with pleasant boyish expectancy. From near the Throne the Grand Duke Michael of Russia looked on. In another part of the House was our own Duke of Connaught, brother of King Edward, the monarch who it seemed might be thrown very soon into the thick of the constitutional battle. The white-robed Bishops were massed in a square phalanx, just to the right of the Woolsack; the Conservative Peers, making up their bulk of numbers by means of the "backwoodsmen," filled their own side of the House and overflowed from it on to the big scarlet cushions which serve as seats in front of the Lord Chancellor; and opposite, on the Government side, were the handful of Peers who called themselves Liberal, and who had in face of the majority to champion Mr. Lloyd George and his Budget. Even as the House of Commons had been overwhelmingly in favour of the Budget, so was the House of Lords overwhelmingly against it. What their opposition was going to cost them the Lords knew not.

The quiet and unconcerned attitude of the Peers would have been a marvellous thing to any stranger. They had determined to take part in the making of a national climax; from their air and bearing it would have been hard to believe they were doing anything more exciting than discussing with proper decorum some agricultural problem affecting big estates. Now, as always, they adhered to their standard of manners, and though they permitted themselves whispers and occasionally undertoned conversations, there were none of

those surging mutterings, none of that barely concealed passion which would have marked even the preliminary stages of such an occasion in the House of Commons. Never has the difference between the two Houses been thrown in greater relief. No excitement here among this assembly of nobles and princes, rather indeed a severer dignity; and they scornfully showed their restraint not only in their expression, but in the very way they sat in their seats, upright, easy, correct—with none of that sprawling which is the affectation of ease in the House of Commons. No one with a feeling for history could have looked unmoved on this gathering arrayed once more for the ever-renewable battle of the centuries between privilege, power and rank on the one side and on the other the onward moving claim of the unpossessing. For with all their quietness, all their aspect of respectable commonplace, this gathering of middle-aged and elderly gentlemen were soon to demonstrate that they had flung away the scabbard.

Lord Lansdowne, the spokesman of the Conservatives, was just the man for the task of making clear their attitude. He was a precise, full-blooded aristocrat of Whig tendencies, who would have been distinguished by his ability if he had started with no help from birth at all. As a debater he excelled every member of the House of Lords, except the Lord Chancellor. He possessed tact, swift comprehension, and a luminous gift of words. In the midst of intricate debate wherein Ministers and ex-Ministers have floundered along in a fog of phrases, Lord Lansdowne has stepped in and with a dozen sentences thrown the contentions of both sides into an electric sharpness and vividness. He had the power

(given in the superlative to Mr. Asquith in the other House) of tearing the heart out of a subject with deftness and swift certainty. Besides this he was a clever guider of men, and was particularly valuable as leader of the Peers because there was no effective party organisation in the Upper House such as in the House of Commons derives its efficacy from the elective nature of the Chamber. Rarely were there rebels from the commandership of this quietly competent statesman. In appearance he was slim and dapper, always wore a frock coat, and generally a bow tie. But there was no effeminacy in his primness. His rapid determined steps, his poised head, and a mellow but commanding tone in his voice, all united to give one the impression of a strong man. It was a perfectly correct impression. Tactful and delicate were his words, but one always realised that hard purpose and a cold brain were behind them.

On this afternoon Lord Lansdowne carried the responsibility of sounding the note of war, a war which might eventually threaten the very existence of the House of Lords itself, but he was as calm and collected when he stepped to the Table to deliver his speech, as if he were merely putting questions to Ministers about the course of routine business.

At the very outset of his speech he struck boldly at the root of the argument of the Government, about the constitutional inability of the Lords to interfere with the Finance Bill.

“Is there any organic law which covers the case?” asked Lord Lansdowne. “Is there any compact between the two Houses to which any one can refer? Are there any *obiter dicta* of eminent men which support the theory?”

I am aware of no such authorities to show that this House is precluded either from discussing or from rejecting the Bill upon the Table. I may be told that such a course is unusual. So it is. But is this a usual Budget? If this Bill is to pass into law it must be enacted 'by the King's Most Excellent Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal.' Is that some mere musty anachronism? I think not."

From this Lord Lansdowne passed on to describe how each House of Parliament had its own opinion as to the privileges attaching to it. "But I do desire to put this to your lordships, that if you take the House of Commons' claim at its highest, you will not find that claim bars the right of the Lords to reject a Bill of this kind." He quoted one of the ancient resolutions to the effect that while the Lords might not alter a Money Bill they might reject it altogether. "I venture to suggest that if that right was necessary in the seventeenth century it has become indispensable to us to-day. Two practices have lately grown up which seem to me to establish my point. I refer in the first place to the tendency to interpret the privilege of the House of Commons with a degree of strictness which I believe never obtained to the same extent in former times. Another practice has grown up, quite a recent practice, I mean the practice of grouping together under one Bill a large number of measures dealing with different taxes. That is a recent practice, and it never assumed its present proportions until the year 1894. In the year 1894 the annual taxing bill ceased to be a mere Customs and Inland Revenue Bill; and became a kind of omnibus finance measure. And this change was made with the obvious intention of

embarrassing your Lordships in the exercise of your undoubted rights.

“What is the combined effect of these two innovations? The effect of them is this. We find ourselves confronted with a kind of hotch-potch of financial legislation, and we are told that while on the one hand we are precluded from dealing with each tax upon its merits, on the other we are precluded also from altering a single word or a single line in any one of these measures. Is it not obvious that we are thus driven back upon the only remedy which is open to us—I mean the remedy of rejection—if in such cases we deem it desirable that that should take place.”

He gave as an example of the position in which the Lords found themselves in the existing state of affairs with regard to two subjects of proposed legislation. The Finance Bill included provisions for the valuation of land; and a certain procedure in connection with licensed property, and he pointed out that the House of Lords had already disagreed with the land valuation proposals in a Scottish Land Bill, and also with the various proposals in the Licensing Bill. These measures, owing to the Lords' opposition, had not become law, but the rejected principles had now found their way into the Finance Bill which it was claimed could not be touched. “I ask your Lordships what self-respecting Second Chamber would tolerate such treatment.”

The Ministerialists sat in gloomy silence. They had come to hurl defiance at the Conservative Peers, to declare that if they rejected the Budget the Government would take any and every step to make the elected Commons predominant in the state. The Conservative Peers who

had been used to hard words from their opponents for generations, accustomed to threats which meant nothing, and secure in the proven safety of the past, were (it was apparent even in their demeanour) prepared to treat the fierce warnings of the Government men with a certain assured complacency, not to say condescension. They felt very sure of themselves. It would, I think, have been very strange if they had not. The very appearance of the House with its tremendous force of Conservatives gave a sense of unshakable power over and above the clamouring Commoners at the other end of the long corridor. True, there were experienced statesmen who doubted the policy of the heroic course proposed, but speaking generally there was a not unbecoming arrogance about the House, a spirit of amazed resentment at the audacity of the Chancellor of the Exchequer in trying to conquer the Upper House by tactics. The Conservative Peers were in the mood of those determined to stand no nonsense. That this little Welsh desperado should secure his way because of pedantry on inconsiderable constitutional points, was to them unbelievable; and with all its dignity, Lord Lansdowne's speech gave a hint of the prevalent impulse.

The first man to step into the fray after Lord Lansdowne was Lord Loreburn, the Lord Chancellor. He was an out-and-out Radical, and a man who never minced his words, even after he had entered upon the great post of president of the Upper Chamber. There was always a bull-dog directness and courage about Lord Loreburn. It was well instanced when on occasions such as this, he rose from the Woolsack, stepped to one side of it, to show that he was no longer the impartial chairman, but the

spokesman of a party, and then proceeded to talk quietly; firmly, and very frankly to his opponents sitting in unbroken lines on his left. He was even more direct and uncompromising than usual when he rose that night to follow Lord Lansdowne.

He began by denying point blank that any of the extensive provisions of the Finance Bill were provisions which could not properly be regarded as an integral part of a Budget. He quoted the rule laid down over 200 years before by the House of Lords, "The annexing of any clause or clauses to a Bill of aid or supply, the matter of which is foreign to and different from the matter of the said Bill of Aid or Supply, is unparliamentary and tends to the destruction of the constitution of this Government."

"Is valuation foreign to and different from the subject-matter of this Bill?" asked Lord Loreburn. "It is impossible to raise land taxes, you could not raise a shilling of them, except you have a valuation." He declared that the licensing clauses were simply clauses increasing and varying existing taxes. "Are we then precluded, under any doctrine of 'tacking' from altering the incidence or increasing the burden of existing taxes merely because we unsuccessfully brought in a Licensing Bill last year?"

The principal part of his speech, however, consisted of an attack upon the Conservatives for proposing to break the constitutional practice in throwing out the Finance Bill. His words were clear and emphatic.

"Is it not familiar knowledge to all students of the constitution that until the year 1860 there were constantly money bills brought forward for this, that, and

the other tax; a number of them in the course of the same year; and that they were often so mixed up with other matter that the money provision itself constituted a very small part of the measure? Then in the year 1860, when this House threw out the Bill for the repeal of the Paper Duty, the House of Commons passed a resolution asserting that they had themselves the power of keeping their own rights inviolate, and the next year they put all the money provisions of the year into one Bill. It was passed by your Lordships, it has been passed ever since by your Lordships. It is the Finance Bill of the year which contains the whole provision of supply of the year, and throwing out that is refusing supplies for the year. Lord Monkswell, who was a great authority, raised in the House of Commons, when he was a member of the House; the serious question whether any pure money bill, small or large, had ever been thrown out by this House. Certainly it never was before 1708, but I will assume, though I do not wholly assent, that it has been done on various occasions in the course of these small and unimportant bills. But it has never been done, never, in regard to the finance of the year, and the claim which is put forward now is a claim for the right to refuse supplies.

“ Every year all the estates of the realm combine to pay homage to the rights of the House of Commons in regard to money bills. The Crown itself acknowledges their power. In a speech from the Throne every year the request for supply is addressed only to the House of Commons, to ‘Gentlemen of the House of Commons’ distinguished from your Lordships. The estimates of the year upon which of course all ways and means must be founded are never submitted to this House. There are

instances in which requests for estimates; even for a copy of the estimates, have been refused by the House of Commons. The preamble of the Act which each year grants supply records it to be the grant of the Commons. Every year frequently in this very House, the motion is made that 'privilege amendments' be agreed to—that is to say amendments which would prevent interference with the privileges of the House of Commons in matters of supply. But the most conspicuous and most significant of the indications which are so familiar to us all is the practice in regard to money resolutions in the House of Commons. Money resolutions in committee of supply are passed without any authority from this House or without consulting it. From the day on which they pass they are acted upon as though they were law embodied in an Act of Parliament; and money is raised, taxes are levied, for the whole of the remainder of the session, until the Act has passed into law by virtue merely of the resolutions of the House of Commons. That practice shows the very necessity under which we stand, and therefore partly the secret of the origin of the practice of the constitution. It shows the very necessity in which we stand that one chamber and one chamber alone should have the power of the purse. You are obliged to act on the authority of one Chamber, because otherwise as soon as ever the existence of the tax was indicated and the merchant knew that the tax would be imposed, all the stuff would be withdrawn from the warehouses, and the tax would be fruitless.

“Let me tell the noble Lord what money is now to-day being raised by virtue of the resolutions of the House of Commons passed earlier in this year. The whole of the

income tax; the whole of the tea duty, the new or additional taxes upon land, spirits, tobacco, licences, motors, death duties and stamps. Your Lordships are not accustomed to deal with these things, there is no instance before in the whole history of this House, there is no instance before of this House ever having confronted the problem of what is to be done in the event of Supply being stopped. The absence of precedent and the financial confusion which must follow from the step that is now about to be taken by this House, are surely danger signals which must show that we are approaching constitutional shoals."

Lord Loreburn lifted an admonitory finger towards the Conservative Peers. "My Lords, I believe that the action you are asked to take is a direct invasion both of the prerogative of the Crown, and of the privileges of the House of Commons. The power in this country is divided between King, Lords, and Commons. To the Crown belongs the supreme authority over all, checked by the doctrine of Ministerial responsibility, and by the power of the House of Commons to refuse supplies. To the House of Commons belongs the control over the Purse, and therefore the control over Ministers of the Crown, checked by the power of the royal prerogative of dissolution, residing in the Crown. To the Lords belong the supreme jurisdiction in the administration of justice, surely of itself a noble attribute, together with a full share in all legislation except finance. There is no check on this House except the creation of Peers. Such is the ancient and famous balance of power known to our constitution, the envy of other nations, which your Lordships are now being invited to overthrow. What must

flow from this decision? If it be established that your Lordships can succeed in persuading the country, I will not say to condone, I will more courteously say to approve the step which is about to be taken, this House for which elections have no terrors, consisting of men who have not been elected and need not fear that they will not be re-elected, will hold at mercy the House of Commons and have the Government of the day in the hollow of its hand. If the House of Commons should displease your Lordships, however recently they may have come from the country, you will be able to remit them again to the tortures of the poll. If the Government displease you, all you have to do is to wait for the psychological moment when some gust of dissatisfaction in regard to their conduct, some momentary displeasure may be visible in the constituencies, and put an end to them, if they happen to be of opinions hostile to your own. No wise men would desire that this House should possess such authority as that, and no man of spirit will submit to it."

At the end of Lord Loreburn's speech came the threat which was eventually to be used with the whole force of the Cabinet behind it. "It is in my opinion impossible that any Liberal Government should ever again bear the heavy burden of office unless it is secured against a repetition of treatment such as our measures have had to undergo for the last four years. If we fail in the coming general election, assuming that His Majesty is pleased to dissolve Parliament, it will only be the beginning of a conflict which can end only in one way. If we succeed, I hope we shall not flinch from that which will have to follow. We have not produced this conflict, we have not

provoked it nor at any time desired it, but we are not afraid of it, and I hope that we shall none of us fail to do our duty in preserving the constitution of our country."

The determined words of Lord Loreburn did not startle the Conservatives, and it is certain they did not understand the reality which lay behind his forecast of the future. The debate took a course which might be expected of it. Peer after peer, claiming to speak for the people, defied the Government to do its worst. That admirable unregenerate Tory, Lord Halsbury, eighty-four years of age, was running over with vigour and indignation. "The Government say if you won't do this or the other, we will abolish you. That is what it comes to." The Bishop of Bristol was not less emphatic. "If," said he, "your Lordships give way to this threat you will deserve being put an end to." The slim little Duke of Marlborough cried with much emphasis, "Is the constitution to be shattered at the bidding of a demagogue from Wales?"

The steady voices which were heard at intervals were met with silence, and with evident disapproval. The Socialistic Bishop of Birmingham, pleading that the Budget was an attempt in the direction of the equalisation of the burdens of the rich and poor, was listened to in a frigid absence of sympathy.

For six days the discussion flowed on. Lord Rosebery, as usual prolific in picturesque phrase, acknowledged that the Budget "poisoned the very sources of our national supremacy," but would not vote for its rejection because he did not think that the fate of the Budget would be mixed up with the fate of the House of Lords. There were others in the same vein. But the chorus was

one of whole-hearted condemnation of the Budget, and cordial endorsement of its destruction or its "reference to the people." Of course strong words were forthcoming from the Liberals. This is what Lord Beauchamp said, "I do not hesitate to say that no more momentous or far-reaching step has been taken in the history of this country since Charles I. raised his standard at Nottingham. In the opinion of the Liberal party this House with its past record, its present constitution; and the powers which exist at present, is unworthy and incapable of guiding the destiny of a great and mighty Empire." This roused loud and contemptuous laughter from the Conservatives. That laughter had its echo when on November 30th, the Lords, by 350 votes to 75, carried Lord Lansdowne's motion which entailed the rejection of the Bill.

Mr. Asquith acted swiftly. On December 1st he gave notice in the House of Commons that on the following day he would move this resolution—

"That the action of the House of Lords in refusing to pass into law the financial provision made by this House for the services of the year, is a breach of the constitution and a usurpation of the rights of the Commons."

The heather was now alight.

CHAPTER VIII

MR. ASQUITH TAKES THE FIELD

THE peculiar quality of Mr. Asquith began to assert itself from the time that conflict with the Lords became imminent, and though his was not, perhaps, the temperament which would of itself have impelled so swiftly the opening of the struggle, there can be no doubt that when once war was declared, he entered the fray with a clear-sighted enthusiasm and a cold determination which were from that time forward the most powerful of the personal influences on the side of the New Liberalism. The flashing genius of Mr. Lloyd George had focussed the fervour of the heterogeneous progressive forces; and he had conducted the campaign to a stage in which the Lords, driven to a disadvantageous position, had entrenched themselves and prepared for a final, prolonged, and desperate resistance. It was here that the masterful brain and the austere personality of the Prime Minister began to dominate the situation. Of course, he had been in more than nominal charge throughout, but his work had not had the prominence of the dashing tactics of Mr. Lloyd George. Now, however, he took command with much decisiveness, and the New Liberals, who a few years before would have distrusted his aversion from political

emotion; found in his very restraint; in his clear and obstinate intellectuality, the exact qualities which above all others were necessary to carry to triumph a campaign which from thence onwards must be conducted not merely strenuously, but with comprehensive and far-reaching organisation, with judgment and a deliberate boldness, with caution and yet with ruthlessness.

The leadership of the party had given opportunity to Mr. Asquith to develop to the full his remarkable gifts. He had been enabled to display more of his sympathies with what I have called the New Liberalism, and with an emphasis of dignity and courtesy towards his opponents there had been growing a deeper and stronger inclination towards the ideals of the more advanced members of his own party. With this had to be taken the fact that his leadership in the Commons, firm and unwavering, had month by month strengthened his hold on the admiration of all parties, and had engendered a personal regard, not only among Liberals and the Labour members, but also among the Irish Nationalists, who, though forming part of the Prime Minister's majority, claimed independence as a party. In a phrase, Mr. Asquith was the strong man softened by responsibility. That clear-cut face, the vigour and cleverness of which was emphasised by the shining silver hair of the man not yet old, gave the impression of one who would drive unswervingly through the buffets of chance; and get a grip on victory, even in the face of catastrophe.

A Prime Minister has to live a life of incessant turmoil; and his work in Parliament is but a part, and often not the larger part, of his daily worries and responsibilities. But Mr. Asquith's heavy burden of empire was but rarely shown

in his face when, at a quarter-past three each afternoon, he strolled into the House of Commons to answer any questions which might have been put down to him as Prime Minister. No haste marked his footsteps, and he bore no sign of the nerve-trying day of work that he had already completed in his department, in his private room, and in the Cabinet chamber. He would pick his way over the outstretched feet of Ministers on the Front Bench on his way with the slow precision of an idler; his hands would be in his trousers pockets, his face would be placid, slightly bored, and his whole attitude that of the saunterer only faintly interested in the scene which his entry into the Chamber had opened up for him. He would drop with an indifferent air into the long line of Ministers on the Front Bench, and casually pick up the order paper of the day with the manner of a man who may as well see what is going on, though it really does not interest him very much. Nevertheless, the advent of the cold-faced Prime Minister had the effect of a tonic on the crowded lines of his supporters, even on a good many of those who up to quite recent times had not been satisfied of his Radical orthodoxy. All had now come to know that Mr. Asquith, with his seeming placidity could, within thirty seconds, turn himself into a dragon of furious action. His icy preparedness for emergencies always invigorated his followers.

When the Prime Minister rose to his feet to enter into debate, the most casual observer would understand at once what made him a power in the House of Commons. From his first dozen words it was apparent that though one might dislike him, it would be impossible to ignore him. His manner varied with the occasion, but it was

generally unsparing, and it was possible for him to brush political friends aside with the same rough verbal gesture that he used to foes. When success was within his grasp; he went out of his way to be conciliatory, but never in the height of battle. I remember how, on one occasion; after the death of Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman, when Mr. Asquith was Prime Minister elect, young Lord Winton, a boisterous boyish politician, inquired whether the Government were going on with their campaign against the Lords. "I have no announcement to make," snapped the Prime Minister, pursing his lips. Up sprang another enthusiastic young Conservative—Mr. Stanley Wilson. "Are we to understand," he asked truculently, "that the matter is no longer one of urgency as we were told last session?" Mr. Asquith rose slowly to the Table; and all the House sank to quietness to listen to the expected Ministerial pronouncement. "The honourable member," said Mr. Asquith, very blandly, "can draw what conclusion he likes." That was typically Asquithian. There was another side to him; equally characteristic. The Prime Minister seated with bored face and with lazy attitude on the Treasury Bench was not the Prime Minister who stood at the Table making a fighting speech. Listlessness would drop from him like a mantle as he rose to expound a new and highly contentious piece of legislation. His pale face would be slightly flushed, his eyes half veiled, unconsciously his shoulders would go back a little; his head would take an aggressive poise. With his steady eyes and steady straight mouth, he was the picture of cold ardour. In that pleasant voice of middle tone, he would open with some well-balanced generalities; in three minutes he would have reached the heart of his

subject, holding the House silent with a supreme lucidity. Here was where he excelled. It was hard to believe when listening to Mr. Asquith that legislative proposals could be complex or intricate. He had the power of making a child understand an Act of Parliament. He could unfold a Budget like a fairy tale and make it seem almost as simple.

There would be no pause in his splendidly modelled sentences. While he delivered them he stood four-square, toying with his eyeglasses, as some speakers toy with their watch-chains. Once in a while, without stopping in his flow of words, he would adjust his glasses to his nose and glance at some figures on the papers before him. Then he would take them off, lay them carefully on the papers in front of him, step back six inches from the Table, and go on as if he had never worn glasses in his life. Sometimes he would half turn towards a particular quarter of the House with a pungent sentence. He would now and again bring his fist down with violence on to the despatch-box. As a rule, he scorned gesture, relying on the modulations of an excellent voice and the completest command of words. Never have I heard a man so certain in spontaneity of elaborate phrasing. Reverberating sentences, all their parts carefully adjusted, and in each a euphony and an epigrammatic effectiveness of meaning, succeeding each other, readily, unfalteringly ; that was one of Mr. Asquith's gifts. Not a word too much, not a word too little did he use. Sometimes there would be indignation in his voice, rarely passion ; but his very deficiencies helped him in the complex task of leading the most critical assembly in the world. Mr. Asquith will have his place in history as a constructive statesman

and administrator, but above all will he be known as a great Parliamentarian.

Here, then, was the man who found himself in the position of leader of the New Liberals at the most trying stage of their battle. From their point of view it would have been hard to secure a better.

The significance of the juncture which had been reached when, following on the rejection of the Bill by the Lords, Mr. Asquith raised his standard by means of the notice of motion in the Commons is easily to be realised when one recalls the events of the preceding three years. In 1906, the New Liberals, hot from the polls, had rushed to Westminster, a tremendous, victorious army, and in the flush of a great success had felt themselves in the possession of the legislative field. Then the check of the Lords had staggered and chilled them. In 1907 and 1908 the continued frustration of their plans by the Upper House made them violently angry, their feelings being heightened by the sense of injustice in the knowledge that practically all Conservative measures had been passed without demur or question by the House of Lords. Their impotence added intensity to their rage. Here was the greatest Parliamentary majority ever known in this country reduced to helplessness by the classes of rank and privilege, who, placed in a position of command by heredity, claimed to know the mind of the people better than the Commoners. Abuse, argument, wrathful threats, swirled and eddied throughout the New Liberalism, and reckless demands for summary adjustment of an intolerable position began to make themselves heard. A certain desperation was spreading when Mr. Lloyd George came forward with his memorable Budget, which (in provisions claimed to be

strictly financial) sought to establish Radical changes, some of which the Lords had already rejected, and others of which must dash against their dearest prejudices. This, of course, opened up a new phase. The delighted Ministerialists in the House of Commons, believing that a way had been found into the enemy's citadel, were openly exultant, and, just for a breathing space, the Peers were shaken by the move of the Chancellor of the Exchequer. They recovered themselves as they realised what they considered to be the "revolutionary" spirit of the Budget, and finally decided to make a move of equal boldness—to defy precedent, and reject the Budget in its entirety. The fury of the Government men can be well imagined. In effect they said, "For essaying this on top of your other presumptions, we will break you utterly." "Nonsense!" replied the Lords contemptuously. "You forget that we are, to all intents and purposes, the nation, the nation whose welfare you are interfering with in your amateurish, plundering way."

Looking back over events, it is easy to see that the Lords were taking big risks. Relying on the dormant Conservatism in the country, the sentiment of the average person for the traditions of the past, the almost instinctive regard of the man in the street for the aristocracy; relying, moreover, on their arguments against the Budget itself, they had determined to bring about a general election in order to defeat the Chancellor of the Exchequer. The stakes were high. As was pointed out by some of their own leaders, defeat on this matter of the Budget would almost certainly lead to a diminution, if not to an abolition of the powers of their own assembly. They determined to take the chance. On their side they had

this argument: "The Budget introduces tremendous changes; if we do not make a stand now, other Budgets may extend and add to those changes, and the reason for our existence will be gone. *Noblesse oblige*. Let us do our duty."

Of course, the Lords did not anticipate defeat; they believed that the majority of the country was with them, that they had behind them most of the essential elements of the nation, and that in this resolute fight against Mr. Lloyd George's "Socialism" they were going to almost certain victory. The Liberals, on the other hand, flaming with indignation, certain that the Chancellor's master-stroke had put the Lords within their power, were eager to appeal to the country. They were obtrusively confident about the opinion of the working people, the mill hands of Lancashire, the miners of Northumberland and Wales, the skilled mechanics of the great manufacturing towns, the lower middle classes in city and country, and some of the more thoughtful of the Conservatives. The bare justice of the Budget provisions would, they felt assured, be recognised by all these. But no Government can go to the country after a period of some years' power without doubts as to the result, for readers of history know that political favour ebbs and flows in this country with almost the regularity of the tides. Moreover, the campaign against the Budget had to be taken into account, and its effect could not be calculated off-hand. The strategy of Mr. Lloyd George had, however, led up to a state of affairs in which there was more for the New Liberalism to gain than to lose—for defeat could only mean a prolongation of the fight, whereas victory would give the Peers a blow from which they could never entirely recover.

Clamorous Liberals thronged the House of Commons on the afternoon of December 2nd, when Mr. Asquith, showing an unusual touch of excitement, rose to the Table. Here was their leader to take them on to victory. That stern, capable face had a thrilling message for those hundreds of excited men. His first words came like a pistol-shot : " We are met here this afternoon in circumstances unexampled in the history of the British Parliament." Then with ringing sentences, which flowed from him with all the semblance of righteous passion, the Prime Minister stirred the blood of his followers and roused them to something like tumult as they recognised that he, on the part of the Government, was replying to the challenge of the Lords and declaring war. For such a situation, Mr. Asquith was unequalled. His gift of definiteness and exposition, of putting moving thoughts into the fewest possible words—all these things threw him up as a hero that afternoon. His speech was a model of its kind. Brevity was not the least of its recommendations. His text, of course, was the motion. Here are the words of it again : " That the action of the House of Lords in refusing to pass into law the financial provision made by this House for the services of the year, is a breach of the constitution and a usurpation of the rights of the Commons."

A hundred applauding exclamations broke forth when he made a turn towards the lower Liberal Benches, and announced in the warmest tone of that rich, inflexional voice : " The House of Commons would, in the judgment of His Majesty's Government, be unworthy of its past and of the traditions of which it is the custodian and the trustee, if it allowed another day to pass without making it clear

that it does not mean to brook the greatest indignity and, I will add, the most arrogant usurpation, to which for more than two centuries it has been asked to submit." Swiftly he came to the point and message of his delivery. "We have advised the Crown to dissolve Parliament at the earliest possible moment." There was a great roar of acquiescence from the New Liberals.

In his own illuminating way, Mr. Asquith revealed the Government opinion of the unprecedented action of the Lords. He emphasised the argument made over and over again in the course of the subsequent discussions as to the constitutional as distinct from the legal powers of the House of Lords. Under the strict letter of the law, it might be possible for them to find a technical power to reject a money bill, but if, throughout a long period of years, such a technical right fell into disuse, there grew up eventually as the result a constitutional precedent against the rejection of such money bills. He gave as an illustration of his argument, the disuse of a monarch's power to veto a measure. "The right of the Crown to veto a bill is just as unquestionable to-day as it was in the time of Queen Elizabeth, but two hundred years of desuetude, and a contrary practice, have made it a legal right, not constitutionally exercised or followed now."

He referred to a speech of Mr. Austen Chamberlain, who had said the distinction between what was constitutional and what was legal, left him cold, and who had spoken of the pedantry of the distinction. "It was pedantry of this kind, the pedantry which realises and dwells upon the distinction between the spirit and the genius of our constitution on the one side, and the power and barren letter of the law on the other—it was pedantry

of this kind which made and saved the liberty of England. It was pedants like Pym and Selden and Somers, who rescued this House largely by the power of the purse, from the domination of the Crown." Finally, Mr. Asquith let himself go in his description of how, when the Conservatives were in power, the country was under the domination of a single chamber, and how, when the Liberals were in power, it was under the retarding effects of two Chambers. "We are living," he cried "under a system of false balances and loaded dice."

Mr. Balfour followed Mr. Asquith with a characteristic speech, not overlaid with argument, but significant in its implied disparagement of Liberal heroics. Here was a Parliament on its deathbed—its quickly approaching decease had been announced by the Prime Minister himself—and yet he had called upon that dying Parliament to pass this high-sounding resolution. Mr. Balfour surveyed the Treasury Bench critically, appraisingly. "They have a perfect passion for these abstract resolutions," he remarked, and he proceeded to extend to them a benevolent toleration. After all, what mattered?—these resolutions hurt nobody, helped nobody, encouraged nobody, frightened nobody. All this was in a tone of that stinging raillery of which he was such a master. The Liberals muttered among themselves. "Enough of this fooling," was what was in their minds. But Mr. Balfour knew his own business much better than they. He was on sure ground. He did not go into Mr. Asquith's speech in detail. He contented himself by making it quite clear that the Lords had a right never given up, of rejecting a money bill, and that it was not merely a legal right, but one in accord with the spirit of the constitution. Apart from that;

he pricked with his sharp wit; the high-sounding historical arguments and lofty constitutional claims of the bustling, hustling majority who followed the banner of the Prime Minister. If Mr. Balfour realised the seriousness of the coming conflict, he concealed it that afternoon.

Parliament was prorogued on the next day; Friday, December 3rd, and from that time onward preparations were afoot for the general election. Lords as well as Commoners flung themselves into the contest; and there began a strife of platform speaking unparalleled in its strength and vigour; the arguments on both sides were pushed home strongly in every town and hamlet, in the streets, in the parks and commons, on the village greens. The excitement of surmise as to the decision of the electorate grew as the days went on, and there was a good deal of speculation as to the course the Government would take should the Liberals be returned once more to power. It was urged by the enthusiasts that the King should be approached with a view to securing from him the promise that if the country endorsed the Government action he would consent to the creation of a sufficient number of Liberal Peers to ensure the triumph of Liberal principles in the House of Lords. "Guarantees" was the word most frequently used in this connection; and the Prime Minister was repeatedly advised to secure these "Guarantees." It was at a meeting in the Albert Hall—the opening of the Liberal platform campaign—that Mr. Asquith delivered himself of a pronouncement which, throughout the weeks of electoral tempest which followed, was on the lips of all his adherents. The meeting was on December 10th; exactly a week after the prorogation of Parliament.

Ten thousand exhilarated Liberals packed the floor and the towering tiers. They cheered, sang songs, and cheered again in their ebullition of feeling. The Albert Hall, when Mr. Asquith stepped on to the platform was like a colossal cauldron of emotion. And then, over that great gathering fell a wonderful silence as the Prime Minister, clear-voiced and unemotional as ever, began to explain his plans. He was, of course, talking not merely to that ten thousand persons, but to all the country.

“ I tell you quite plainly, and I tell my fellow-countrymen outside, that neither I nor any other Liberal Minister supported by a majority of the House of Commons, are going to submit again to the rebuffs and the humiliations of the last four years. We shall not assume office and we shall not hold office unless we can secure the safeguards which experience shows to be necessary for the legislative utility and honour of the party of progress.”

As one of those who were present, I took those words to mean that the Prime Minister had secured the “Guarantees” from the King; and that was the interpretation of the passage by the New Liberals. Mr. Asquith was hailed as the strong man of the situation. His battalions went forth to war cheered, inspirited, rendered jubilant by the knowledge that if they achieved victory, it would not, like some of the victories of the past, be comparatively barren of result.

On January 10th, Parliament was dissolved by royal proclamation. Party cries were already half deafening the community. While the New Liberals were denouncing the Lords and explaining that Tariff Reform meant “ dear food,” the Conservatives were calling on all sensible and

cultured electors to bear in mind the "vulgarity" of Mr. Lloyd George, and were raising an outcry against the "inefficiency" of our naval preparations against Germany, who, it was suggested, was getting ready for an attack on this country. These were incidental distractions from the Budget. It was, I think, the Budget which was the deciding factor in the elections. The first pollings were on January 15th, and the results were coming in before midnight.

CHAPTER IX

THE SEQUEL OF THE ELECTION

SINCE the middle of the last century there has probably been no electoral struggle the result of which was so open, the consequences so important, and the suspense in regard to which was so intense. Each side was supremely confident. To the New Liberals, flushed with anger and enthusiasm, there could be but one answer from the people; to the Conservatives, fighting with their backs against the wall for all they considered most precious, defeat with what would follow was not to be thought of. Even among those not usually very deeply interested in politics there were thrills as the date of the pollings approached. No living person, whatever his position or knowledge, was able to lift a corner of the veil, and Cabinet Ministers and working men, peers, agricultural labourers, factory hands, were united in that expectancy which enveloped the country in the week or so before the elections. The New Liberals kept their spirits up by boldly prophesying a victory similar in magnitude to that of 1906, and the Conservatives, believing that they would be returned to power began formulating the list of those who would be in the coming Conservative Ministry.

In the result, neither side achieved all they had

expected, but the decision of the electors was nevertheless unmistakable. The first pollings on January 15th, showed that the Liberals were going to lose some of those strongholds of Conservatism which they had captured in 1906, but which were now returning to the old allegiance. It soon became evident, however, that the loss would not be sufficient to turn the Government out of office, and that there would be a substantial and working majority if the Nationalists were, as heretofore, included among the New Liberals. Each side professed to be jubilant, but there can be no doubt that each side was much disappointed. The Ministerialist advantage in numbers at the dissolution was 334, and, as the result of the January election of 1910, it came down to 124. The securing of this majority, smaller, but sufficient, was, I think, due primarily to two things—firstly, the country's disapproval of the rejection of the Budget by the Lords, and secondly, the fear of most of the electors of the dearness of food resulting from Tariff Reform. On the other hand, there can be no doubt of the influences which were fighting against the Government. A Ministry which has been in power for four years, especially a Liberal Ministry, with its various new proposals, cannot fail to arouse during that period a great deal of animosity, and this particular Liberal Government was proposing an extraordinary burden upon that section of the community which is almost exclusively Conservative. Conservatives were stirred to the depths, not only by ordinary party prejudices, but by considerations of the class interests which were now being violently attacked. Strange would it have been had they not rallied to a man in defence of what they considered their rights and privileges. Up

to the verge of the election the Peers themselves were to be found on platforms throughout the country, declaiming against the Budget, and furious efforts were made to meet the speeches which were being made about the country by Mr. Lloyd George and Mr. Churchill. On the eve of the election a scare was raised about what was called our naval unpreparedness in view of Germany's growing sea strength. It was plainly suggested that Germany was getting ready to attack us, and the supineness of the Government in not embarking in tremendous expenditure for an increase of our navy was held up as a scandalous and derogatory thing. In spite of the statement that the Government were supported by the naval experts, who composed the Board of Admiralty, a great many voters were undoubtedly influenced by this outcry. But, apart from these considerations, the New Liberals claimed that the result of the election was much more favourable to them than it really appeared, because the Conservatives had secured many seats by reason of the duplicated votes of the plural voters, that is to say, of the men who possessed more than one vote because of their property in various places. Here are the final figures of the election :—

NEW LIBERALS.		CONSERVATIVES.	
Liberals ...	275	Conservatives ...	273
Labour Members	40		
Nationalists ...	71		
Independent Nats.	11		

The new House of Commons was thus divided as follows :—

New Liberals	...	...	397
Conservatives	...	...	273
			124

As the election came to a close there was the inevitable clamour from both sides, the Conservatives loudly asserting that they had banished the majority of the Government, and the Ministerialists calling all to witness that they had made manifest the triumph of the New Liberalism. But from amid all the turmoil, all the bitter cries, all the anger and humiliation, emerged one plain stubborn fact, namely, that the Liberal Government was to begin a fresh period of power with a workable and competent superiority in numbers. Compared with the enormous figures of 1906, a majority of 124 was small, but, regarded in the light of Parliamentary history, it was a majority which, if coherent, could accomplish practically any political project.

One of the points made by the Conservatives was that Mr. Asquith's army was held together by the Nationalists, who, disliking the Budget, were nevertheless tolerating it for the sake of Home Rule, which they now believed to be in sight. "There is really a majority against the Budget," they said; but this statement must be looked upon as one of those party ejaculations which in times of adversity spring from all sections of politicians. The proof that the Conservative party as a whole did not believe that there was a majority in the country against the Budget is to be found in the fact that the Lords accepted the Budget when it was brought before them a second time. By passing it they must be held to have accepted the Liberal contention that the country had approved of the Budget.

The New Liberals recovering from the temporary disappointment of the elections began to see that, in spite of their reverses here and there, they had secured the

means to achieve their great object; that the majority of over one hundred would be sufficient to bring their campaign against the Lords to its culmination, and that only leadership was now necessary to take them on to triumph. Throughout the elections thousands of platforms had rung with vehement prophecies of the Prime Minister's action as to the royal prerogative; and the Liberal newspapers joined in the fierce anticipations. Mr. Asquith's announcement at the Albert Hall seemed to leave no manner of doubt that he had obtained from King Edward a promise that, should the Liberals prove victorious, he would agree to give the Prime Minister a blank cheque for the creation of Peers, so that if the House of Lords should refuse to agree to the future limitations of its powers Liberals might be sent to the Upper Chamber in sufficient numbers to vote the Conservatives down. That was the generally accepted position. Liberals took it for granted, and, more important still, Mr. Asquith did not deny the interpretation placed upon his words. I was one of those present at the Albert Hall, and, as I have said before, Mr. Asquith's words conveyed to me the meaning they conveyed to the world at large.

The excitement with which the assembly of Parliament was anticipated after the general election has not been equalled in any recent period of politics. The Conservatives, strengthened by additions, came back eager to strike a blow at the presumptuous New Liberals, and the Liberal host, lessened in numbers, were angrily determined to do away with the inequalities under which they laboured, and to crush for ever the political presumptions of the Peers. The New Liberals knew that in Mr. Asquith they had a man who would take them straight to battle,

a man who had already approached the Throne on their behalf, who had been silently and sternly working throughout the noisy clash of the election itself ; and the Government men thanked their fate that they had such a captain—unflinching, coldly steadfast, unhesitating ; a man not to be softened by blandishments or persuasion, not to be frightened by forecasts.

The glittering panoply of the opening of Parliament, gorgeous in itself, rich in its associations with the past, had this year a deeper significance than any opening of Parliament within living memory. This might be the last Parliamentary inauguration carrying all the ancient symbolism of the allotted ratio of power given to King, Lords and Commons. The House of Lords on such occasions is a dazzling picture of pomp and circumstance. The scarlet Benches, and Woolsack, the great painted windows, the gilded Throne, the gilded ceiling overhead ; combine to form a magnificent setting for Peers in their elaborate robes of scarlet and white, bewigged judges, diplomats in courtly uniform, officers of state with swords by their sides, and hundreds of Peeresses in shimmering dresses, wearing snowy aigrettes quivering in their hair, with diamonds radiating sparks of light. The sight always reminds me of something which does not belong to real life, something we tell the children out of fairy tales. Only no fairy tale could ever present, with any credibility, such an amazing mixture of crude colour, theatrical effect, ancient romance and real living power.

It was in the neighbourhood of two o'clock on the afternoon of Monday, February 21st, that King Edward and Queen Alexandra entered with all due ceremonial into the House already set and waiting for them. The King

was in uniform; a thick-chested figure of a man looking what he was, the straightforward English gentleman. As for the Queen, her essential dignity and grace fitted her for the part she was playing better even than her beautiful robes, better even than the great fascinating Cullinan diamond, which glittered on her breast with a weird blue beauty. The great assembly stood up. The King escorted the Queen to her seat beside his own; and then; with all the ancient formulas, the Commons were fetched; to hear the King read his speech. When the Speaker, with his fellow-members of the Commons had reached the Bar at the other end of the House, they stood at attention. One of the high dignitaries near the King, handed him a sheet of foolscap with his speech on it. He read it out.

On this occasion the King's Speech, the terms of which are always carefully kept secret till the moment of delivery; was no mere formality. Every one knew that in it there must be some reference to the coming struggle between Lords and Commons. "The gracious speech from the Throne," although delivered in the first person by the Monarch is, under our constitution, the work of the Government of the day. The King makes his speech "by the advice" of his Ministers, and the views expressed in it are their views, and not necessarily his views. On this occasion the plans of the Government—even the most nebulous indication of them—were of great interest and importance, but it cannot be denied that, human nature being what it is, the announcement received a piquancy which it would not have possessed had it not come from the lips of the King himself. Little did any of us who listened to the words of King Edward on that occasion think that three months later the people of London would

be mournfully filing past his coffin in Westminster Hall, a hundred yards away. His voice was rough, and loud and clear as usual. The silence of that imposing assembly may be well imagined when he came to the vital words :—

“ My lords and gentlemen, recent experience has disclosed serious difficulties due to recurring differences of strong opinion between the two branches of the legislature. Proposals will be laid before you with all convenient speed to define the relations between the Houses of Parliament, so as to secure the undivided authority of the House of Commons over finance, and its predominance in legislation. These measures in the opinion of my advisers should provide that this House should be so constituted and empowered as to exercise impartially in regard to proposed legislation the functions of initiation; revision, and, subject to proper safeguards, of delay.”

It almost seemed that the listeners took a deep breath. The Peers, Peeresses, Commoners, and the distinguished visitors from abroad, realised that the Government was going to fight.

Even those who have no acquaintance with Parliamentary life will be able to understand the zest with which Members of the House of Commons flocked back to their own Chamber to hear the speech which the Prime Minister must make in the course of the evening. After the formal opening of Parliament there is an interval of an hour and a half, and then both Houses reassemble for debate on the motion for the presentation of a loyal address in reply to the speech from the Throne. This debate always gives opportunity for general exposition and general criticism of the Government's line of policy as indicated in the speech. There was the knowledge that Mr. Asquith must

announce to the House and the country that evening his plan of procedure. The grim silence of the organiser must now disappear. The trumpet had sounded. He must give his followers that lead which they were now almost feverishly expecting. That was the situation when, at four o'clock in the afternoon, the newly elected members of the House of Commons were packing every Bench and filling every foot of standing room in the Lower Chamber.

In accordance with custom, the motion for the address was brought forward by two back-bench members, on this occasion Mr. Illingworth and Mr. C. E. Price. The House gave them that courteous attention which is always given to movers and seconders of the Address. But beneath the courtesy of the House, there was the simmer of nervous impatience at what was so soon to follow. A play-writer would give much to be able to produce a situation so potential. All were kept on tenter-hooks, even after Mr. Illingworth and Mr. Price had finished their speeches, because, following precedent, Mr. Balfour, as leader of the Opposition, made the next speech. He, however, was not confined to beneficent generalities like the two private Liberals, and, in his own deft way, he taunted Mr. Asquith with a view to getting him to commit himself. "The Government scheme for reforming the House of Lords I gather to be in the making," he remarked, in his dainty manner of reflectiveness. "I do not understand the sentence in the King's speech in which these changes are described, that amazing piece of English which appears in so far as it has any meaning at all to embody two quite different policies, which have no connection whatever, except that it has been found possible to force them into the framework of one ungrammatical

sentence." Remarking on the fact that the King's Speech was the work of his Ministers, and not of His Majesty himself, he went on, "Some unkind person has said that the speech is always more stupid than the most stupid man in the Ministry. The grammar of the King's Speech is not always very good, but sometimes it is worse even than that of the most illiterate man in the Cabinet. I hail the ambiguities lurking in that remarkable specimen of the mother tongue, I hail its ambiguities as showing that the Government itself has not yet made up its mind as to the precise character of the change which it intends to introduce into this ancient constitution."

There was an encouraging roar from the New Liberals when Mr. Asquith rose to reply. It was common knowledge that a thrilling announcement was imminent. Exactly what form it would take was a matter of guess-work. Mr. Asquith was more than usually serious, and it was evident that, in spite of a very strong will and great self-control, the responsibility of his position was heavy on him. His words were slow and measured, and they came from him without that fillip of assertive confidence which, as a rule, gave flavour to all he said. He began by going over some of the old ground again, and pointed out the necessity for curbing the power of the Lords. "If you are to get Home Rule, or to get any of these immense changes in legislation which all progressive parties desire, you must make as a condition precedent to that the abolition of the absolute veto of the House of Lords." Very quickly he came to the terms of the King's Speech. "Its outstanding feature is that the legislative programme which it invites Parliament to consider consists of a single document. Apart from the financial

provisions necessary for the public services, the only question on which we announce our intention of making legislative proposals to the House of Commons is the question of the relations between the two Houses."

Mr. Asquith grew a little warmer, a little more emphatic, as he came again to the oft-told sins of the Peers. "We did not regard the rejection of the Budget by the House of Lords as an isolated act. It was the climax of a series of acts in which that House had claimed, and had freely exercised, co-ordinate, or I may more truly describe it as an over-riding authority in connection with the acts and decisions of the popularly elected Chamber. Speaking on behalf of the Liberal party, we said we could not go on under such a system as that."

As Mr. Asquith approached the summit of his speech attention in the House increased. There was as near an approximation to absolute silence as is possible in an assembly of several hundred men. No one spoke, no one even rustled an order paper. Most members on the back Benches were leaning forward a little so that they might hear the easier. Such circumstances generally inspire Mr. Asquith, but they did not do so on this occasion. Something in his words, his tone, gave the impression that there was a retarding influence acting on him, a hidden thought that was keeping back from full activity a very stalwart fighter. "I said, and I have nothing to retract or qualify, that in our view it was a condition of the tenure of power of a Liberal Government that the new Parliament should, to the exclusion and postponement of all other legislative business, set to work to provide safeguards for the rights of the House of Commons for legislation—those statutory safeguards, safeguards embodied in an

Act of Parliament assented to by King, Lords, and Commons."

It is, of course, impossible to know all that was passing through Mr. Asquith's mind at this moment; but it was quite apparent he realised that what he was going to say next would be unpalatable and unsatisfying to the great bulk of his supporters. He forced himself to a pitch of emphasis, but, in spite of that emphasis of words, there was a certain hesitancy of tone, a regret that he was compelled to a line of action which did not entirely commend itself to him. He struck me at that moment as a strong man, condemned by force of circumstances or the call of duty to take the course of a weaker man, and to take that course without being able to explain why, without being able to do more than justify his new course of action on its surface merits.

"I see that in some quarters—not at all unfriendly quarters—I am supposed to have intended to convey what I certainly never said, that a Liberal Ministry ought not to meet a new House of Commons unless it had secured in advance some kind of guarantee for the contingent exercise of the royal prerogative." There was a cold silence everywhere throughout the House. New Liberals wondered what was coming next. Was this the man who had approached the Crown on their behalf, was this the strong man of action who feared nought, who was to lead his followers with stern determination to their triumph? It was easy to see that Mr. Asquith felt the atmosphere of the House. "I have been engaged now for a good many years in political life, and I do not think even among gentlemen who sit opposite, there is one who will deny that I am a man of my word."

The House of Commons had the strange spectacle of one of its fighting commanders suddenly changed from a general leading a victorious army to a man pleading in his own defence. "If I did give such a pledge as that I should not be standing at this box this moment. I tell the House quite frankly that I have received no such guarantee and that I have asked for no such guarantee. In my judgment it is the duty of statesmen; of all responsible politicians in this country, as long as possible and as far as possible, to keep the name of the sovereign and the name of the Crown outside the domain of party politics." The New Liberals were aghast, even the Conservatives were surprised. "What has happened?" was the question that sprang to everybody's mind. It is impossible to say, even yet, what was the cause of Mr. Asquith's attitude on that memorable afternoon. The impression conveyed to the great majority of those present, and certainly conveyed to myself, was that something unexpected had arisen to check, or at least to modify, the Prime Minister's pre-arranged scheme of action. Mr. Asquith had to reveal himself that afternoon to the New Liberals, at any rate, as weaker than they had thought him, as more vacillating than they had conceived it possible for him to be. He was in a false light. The human point of the situation was that he seemed to realise it all, and voluntarily to enter upon what he considered to be his duty without being able to explain why he took that particular course, and in the absolute certainty that his new attitude would be misunderstood.

"If the occasion should arise," he said, "I should not hesitate to tender such advice to the Crown as in the

circumstances the exigency of the situation appeared to warrant in the public interest. But to ask in advance for a blank authority, for an indefinite exercise of the royal prerogative in regard to a measure which has never been submitted to it or approved by the House of Commons, is a request which, in my judgment no constitutional statesman can properly make, and it is a concession which his sovereign cannot be expected to grant."

After this the staggered New Liberals listened coldly to the leisured plan of procedure which he announced with regard to the two Houses of Parliament. A series of resolutions containing proposals were to be passed through Parliament, and they were then to be embodied in a Bill for subsequent passage into law. The procedure by way of resolution would give ample opportunity for discussion of the whole matter in its widest form.

But these announcements were no consolation to the irate Mr. John Redmond, leader of the Irish party, who sprang up immediately after Mr. Asquith, and almost bluntly accused him of want of faith. Mr. Redmond saw the hopes of Home Rule disappearing under the slower process of constitutional change indicated by the fact that the Prime Minister had not secured the much-talked of "guarantees" from the King. But he spoke not only for the Nationalists that afternoon, but also for the mass of the Liberals. "We understood the right honourable gentleman to mean by that declaration (at the Albert Hall) that he and his colleagues would not remain responsible for the government of this realm unless he had safeguards, assurances, guarantees—call them what you like—that he might if necessary, rely on the royal prerogative to enable him to pass a veto Bill through

Parliament this year. He has told us to-night that by safeguards he meant an Act of Parliament. But I cannot imagine if that were his meaning he would have remained silent in face of the universal interpretation of his words."

Harsh and minatory was Mr. Redmond's tone as he flung his accusation across the floor of the House. "The belief was that the Government had given the pledge that they would ask for guarantees as to the use of the royal prerogative, and if they did not get those guarantees they would decline to hold office."

CHAPTER X

MR. ASQUITH FORCES THE PACE

THE ranks of the New Liberals, openly dismayed at what they considered the change of attitude on the part of the Prime Minister, muttered among themselves, threw out hints of rebellion, and called the universe to witness the futility of trifling. What had influenced the Prime Minister they could not say, nor did they try to guess. They were concerned only with the fact that time had been placed at the service of the enemy, that Mr. Asquith had unloosed his grasp of the weapon which had been put in his hand. Why had he not dealt swiftly and courageously with the situation? Why had he not gone to the King with an ultimatum on behalf of himself and his Government? There were many shakings of the head and many forebodings. Oh, for the Cromwellian spirit as well as the Cromwellian manner, sighed the New Liberals.

Now that the task has been completed, realising the bold strategy and the sure prevision of events displayed by the Prime Minister, seeing now, how over the long course of the campaign, he pursued his plans with shrewdness and calmness, one can understand that Mr. Asquith did nothing likely to peril the objects of his party. Though his action at the time seems thoroughly inconsistent, his strategy

as a whole has been amazingly successful. One does not probe too deeply the impulses of a general who leads his forces to an eventual triumph, even if on one occasion his feelings have been responsible for some generous action not in keeping with his general scheme of battle. Those who knew Mr. Asquith best, declared him to be in private life very sensitive, intensely loyal in friendship, and with rigid ideas as to the obligations which his position entailed upon himself. It is, perhaps, not unreasonable to suppose that after the Albert Hall speech he came to the conclusion that action so speedy and so drastic as he was at first disposed to take might place King Edward in a position which a generous-hearted sovereign, ruling over all sections of his people, Conservatives as well as Liberals, would find personally painful and embarrassing. There was a certain deep chivalry behind Mr. Asquith's brusque manner and words, and it is a fair hypothesis that—looking far ahead, and seeing victory assured and inevitable—he determined to face the impatience of his supporters and not to rush matters in a period of weeks.

There was something like a prayerful gasp of relief from the New Liberals when there appeared on the notice paper the resolutions which Mr. Asquith proposed to ask the House of Commons to pass, and which set forth the proposals for dealing with the House of Lords. I have already stated that these Resolutions, when passed, were to be put in the form of a Bill. The idea underlying this procedure was that the plan of the Government would thus have to undergo the ordeal of debate, not once, as in the case of most legislative proposals, but twice, since the Bill to be founded on the resolutions would again have to run the gauntlet of Parliamentary criticism.

I give in full Mr. Asquith's notice of the resolutions.

RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO HOUSES OF PARLIAMENT.

That this House will immediately resolve itself into a Committee to consider the relations between the two Houses of Parliament and the question of the duration of Parliament.

Resolutions to be proposed in Committee :—

1. *Money Bills*.—That it is expedient that the House of Lords be disabled by law from rejecting or amending a money bill, but that any such limitation by law shall not be taken to diminish or qualify existing rights and privileges of the House of Commons. For the purpose of this resolution a bill shall be considered a money bill if in the opinion of the Speaker it contains only provisions dealing with all or any of the following subjects, namely, the imposition, repeal, remission, alteration, or regulation of taxation ; charges on the Consolidated Fund or the provision of money by Parliament ; supply ; the appropriation, control, or regulation of public money ; the raising or guarantee of any loan or the re-payment thereof ; or matters incidental to those subjects or any of them.
2. *Bills other than Money Bills*.—That it is expedient that the powers of the House of Lords as respects bills other than money bills be restricted by law so that any such bill which has passed the House of Commons in three successive sessions, and having been sent up to the House of Lords at least one month before the end of the session, has been rejected by that House in each of those sessions, shall become law without the consent of the House of Lords on the royal assent being declared ; provided that at least two years shall have elapsed between the date of the first intro-

duction of the bill in the House of Commons, and the date on which it passes the House of Commons for the third time. For the purposes of this resolution, a bill shall be treated as rejected by the House of Lords if it has not been passed by the House of Lords either without amendment or with such amendments only as may be agreed upon by both Houses.

3. *Duration of Parliament.*—That it is expedient to limit the duration of Parliament to five years.

The New Liberals were very pleased with the severity of the change proposed, and there was a great outcry from the Conservatives, who said that the Government were suggesting nothing less than single-chamber government. Wild and whirling words were used on both sides. The Conservatives were persistent in their asseverations that they would resist to the last the breaking-up of the ancient framework of our national government. It was obvious to all the world now that this was no make-belief fight, that we were in the thick of a contest about which there would be striking chapters in the history books.

The House of Commons was thronged and excited on March 29th, when Mr. Asquith rose to put forward the first of his motions to the effect that the House should formally go into committee in order to discuss the matter. Every member who could possibly attend was in his place. Up in the middle of the Peers' gallery, immediately over the clock, sat the Prince of Wales, elbows on the rail in front of him, listening with deep interest to all that was said. Little did he dream that a year hence he would be the central figure in the struggle, and that on him would fall the task of endorsing as King the tremendous changes now being definitely put forward.

Mr. Asquith was a different man in comparison with himself when he damped the New Liberals' enthusiasm a few weeks before. He was like a fighter with fetters removed, with his good sword in his hand and his enemy in front of him. His massed supporters cheered him again and again as he attacked the Lords with all the forcefulness, all the great adjectives, all the deadly lucidity which made him so tremendous a Parliamentary gladiator. But they cheered more than ever the spirit of the man, because he was really roused. He had merged himself completely in the battle. From his words flamed justice and urgency. One could see that Mr. Asquith had bent all his powers to this his supreme task. Watching him, it was impossible not to realise that, by his strong rushing, resounding words, the statesman was bending himself to an effort by which in history he must be known as Prime Minister. "I deny that we live in this country except in name under a bi-cameral system," he thundered. Turning from one quarter of the House to another, he described the way in which a Liberal Government was harassed and impeded by an hereditary House of Lords overwhelmingly Conservative. He did not spare the Peers. "The present House of Lords," he cried, "is governed by partisanship tempered by panic." How the New Liberals cheered!

Mr. Balfour rose to the occasion in the way to be expected of him. He met the Prime Minister's downright slashing and apparently irresistible attack with inspiring skill, a delightful confidence in his own gifts, and with swift and subtle counter-thrusts, effective in their very deviousness and unexpectedness. Mr. Asquith, backed by a large majority, flushed with determination had

presented propositions which seemed to those who listened to be invincible: Mr. Balfour met them as a supreme master of fence might meet the onslaught of a murderous giant armed with a broadsword. He parried, he sprang back, he nullified terrific blows, and while his skill dazzled even his opponents, he managed occasionally to get a thrust home. His speech was a masterpiece of its kind. He analysed the Government's proposals, argued their futility, exposed their weak parts without mercy, and brought into play finally his great powers of mockery and ridicule. He made an attempt to laugh the proposals out of court. Only a very bold and a very clever man would have made the attempt. If the task proved too much for him, I do not think there is any living man who could have succeeded. He criticised the Government plan in the delicate tone and manner of a cultured person dealing not too seriously with a theatrical play which, with pretensions to being serious drama, was marked by a youthful crudity and unreality. "The five-year Parliaments are to be divided into two parts, the one-chamber part and the two-chamber part. For one period we shall be governed by Costa Rica, and the other by the traditional method of Great Britain." This was a hit at what was regarded as the unchecked power of the House of Commons during one session of the Parliament. "This, Sir," declaimed he, flinging out his hands towards the Speaker, "is harlequin government, half black, and half white."

Then a very different person to Mr. Asquith or to Mr. Balfour entered the debate. Mr. Redmond, rising from a corner seat below the gangway, holding in his hand nearly eighty votes, was in some directions the master of the House of Commons. He could make or break

Governments. If he had united with the Conservatives for any purpose, he could within twenty-four hours have sent Mr. Asquith and his colleagues to the King with their resignations. The House and the country had been interested and even excited by the way he had threatened Mr. Asquith when the latter made his announcement at the opening of Parliament. What now was to be said by the grim Irish leader about the published scheme of the Government? The House was not long left in doubt. There cannot fail to be an aspect of menace about a square-faced, heavily built and resolute politician who has been fighting as a leader of a national party with political adversity for a period of years. Mr. Redmond looked not less harsh than usual on this evening; his tone was not more than usually promising. It soon was evident, however, that what he had to say was in the way of cautionary warning rather than of condemnation. The resolutions, he announced, would be supported by his followers, but there was a condition. Looking across at the Treasury Bench, he plainly told Mr. Asquith that if, after the Commons had passed the resolutions they were sent to the Lords and the Lords refused to accept them, then, without delay, the Prime Minister must go to the Throne and ask for "guarantees," and if they were refused he must appeal to the country without attempting to pass into law the much-delayed Budget of 1909. The sting of this demand lay in the fact that without the help of the Nationalists, it was impossible for the Government to pass the Budget.

Many were the notable speeches that were made in the course of the discussion on that day and on following days. It is impossible to refer to them all. Among those who reached passages of real eloquence was Lord Hugh Cecil,

who; forgetting party bitterness, of which at times he provided extreme manifestations, lifted himself, and the House as well, to thoughts quite beyond the occasional sordidness of political controversy. Here are the words with which he concluded his speech :—

“ I look upon our constitution with something more than the reverence with which a man of good taste looks upon an ancient and beautiful building. I look upon it as a temple of the twin deities of Liberty and Order which Englishmen have so long worshipped to the glory of their country. Let us then go into the temple and con over its stones and saturate ourselves with its atmosphere, and then, continuing its traditions, let us adorn and embellish it. Then we, too, shall partake of something of its renown, our figures will, perhaps, be found in it, our names be graven on its stone, and so we shall attain a measure of immortality. High on the eminence of its glory our fame will stand safe and secure, safe from the waters of oblivion; safe from the tide of time.”

That smiling philosopher, Mr. Birrell, followed Lord Hugh, and, with his good-humoured wit, effected at once a change in the atmosphere. “ The noble lord,” he said, “ almost made the honour of a baronetcy acceptable to my mind.” The tribute to Lord Hugh’s defence of the hereditary principle delighted all the House.

It was on March 31st that Sir Robert Finlay moved the official amendment to the motion of the Prime Minister. It was to the effect that while the House was willing to consider proposals for the reform of the constitution of the existing Second Chamber, it declined to accede to proposals which would destroy the usefulness of any

Second Chamber, however constituted, and would thus remove the only safeguard against great changes which had not been approved by the electorate. Before the division was taken on this amendment on April 4th, there were two incidents which must be mentioned. One was the fact that on March 31st the Prime Minister tabled a closure motion under which the veto resolutions were to be forced through the House of Commons by April 14th; an indication that no delay by prolonged debate would be tolerated. The other incident was an announcement by Mr. John Redmond, in a speech at Tipperary, on April 3rd. The Irish leader defined exactly what the Government must do if they desired help and co-operation of the Nationalist Party. The 1909 Budget, he said, must be kept in reserve by the Government until they knew what course the Lords were going to take in regard to the veto resolutions. If the Lords rejected the resolutions, Mr. Asquith must ask for "guarantees" from the King, and if they were refused, he must resign office.

Mr. Redmond's plan of action if carried out would have led to a constitutional climax of great magnitude; which he plainly saw and was prepared for. Assuming that the refusal of the Crown to give the "guarantees" would be followed by Mr. Asquith's resignation, the King would presumably send for Mr. Balfour to form a Government. If Mr. Balfour had formed a Government he would have found himself in the House of Commons unable to vote a single penny of money, unable to take the smallest step in the legislative direction, because of the hostile majority facing him. What would have happened then could only be a matter of guesswork. Mr. Redmond realised what a strong position he was in in putting forward

his demand, because all the while that the Budget was held up, there was necessarily great delay and confusion in the finances of the country. It was possible to claim that the rejection of the Budget by the Lords was responsible for all that followed, and if they now rejected the veto resolutions, they would be throwing the financial arrangements of the country into a disastrous muddle. This, then, was the position when, on April 4th, the House of Commons rejected Sir Robert Finlay's amendment by 357 votes to 201.

In the succeeding days the various resolutions, hotly discussed, were carried in the teeth of the Conservative opposition in the Commons. There were exciting final scenes on April 14th. Under the time-table scheduled in the Government closure motion, the debate on the second veto resolution was to cease automatically at half-past seven. The final resolution, limiting the duration of Parliament to five years, was comparatively unimportant, and there was allotted to it the time between half-past seven and eleven o'clock. The second resolution taking away the Lords' power to reject ordinary legislation was the kernel of the Government's proposal, and, at the close of the discussion on it, every one expected that Mr. Asquith would say something as to the intentions of the Government. It was known that he intended to wind up the debate. He did not rise to speak until sixteen minutes past seven, thus leaving himself exactly fourteen minutes for his speech. Perhaps he had held himself back to this late period of the evening in order that there should be no opportunity of debate or response on the statement he was about to make. Certain it is that that would have been the effect, if Mr. Balfour had not audaciously spiked

his guns. While Mr. Asquith had decided that he would reserve his announcement until the last, Mr. Balfour had determined that the announcement should not be made at all unless there was an opportunity of replying to it. So that electricity was in the air from the moment that Mr. Asquith rose to the Table. It was about eight minutes before half-past seven, that Mr. Asquith came to his point: "I think it right to say that if the House of Lords fail in regard to this resolution or the others, and this resolution is the centre and core of the scheme——"

Mr. Balfour rose to the Table to interrupt. For a moment Mr. Asquith paused as if doubtful whether he should give way, and then, falling in with the courteous custom of leaders to each other, took his seat to hear what Mr. Balfour had to say.

"I understand," remarked the Conservative leader smoothly, "that the Prime Minister is now beginning to discuss what will happen if these resolutions meet in another place with what he calls bad fortune. This would raise a topic of great scope entirely outside the amendment."

Liberals, thinking they detected in Mr. Balfour's leisurely manner an attempt to exhaust the time which was available for the Prime Minister, began to murmur their protests.

"There are exactly seven minutes left," said Mr. Balfour, "and under the very peculiar system under which we carry on our debate——" ("Oh! Oh!" roared the Nationalists) "is the right honourable gentleman in order in dealing with what is going to happen to these resolutions when they reach another place?"

Mr. Emmott, the Chairman, mildly reproved Mr.

Balfour. "I have not yet heard what the Prime Minister is going to say, and I am not yet in a position to say whether he is in order." The Liberals cheered this loudly. Mr. Asquith rose with the suspicion of a smile on his face. "What I was going to say was this, if the Lords fail to accept our policy as embodied in these resolutions——"

Again Mr. Balfour rose to the table to interrupt, and the enraged Liberals shouted at him wildly, for they could see that he was bent on not being outwitted.

"The right honourable gentleman explicitly told us that he proposed to tell the House something not in regard to the amendment, but in relation to what is going to happen, or not going to happen, in the House of Lords. He distinctly says that, and I now ask if he is in order."

"I would prefer to hear what the Prime Minister is going to say," answered Mr. Emmott: "So far as I can judge at present, he is not strictly in order." Turning towards Mr. Balfour, Mr. Emmott continued, "I do not know whether the right honourable gentleman and his friends desire to stop the Prime Minister or not?"

"That's it, that's it!" exclaimed the infuriated Liberals. Everybody's nerves were on edge. Some members were almost screaming in their rage against Mr. Balfour. "Shameless, shameless," they cried. In the midst of this whirlpool of emotion, Mr. Balfour was, as always, debonair and delightful. His attitude was that of a man who could not understand what all the row was about. Really he had done nothing to raise it. He was only desirous of getting a decision on a point of Parliamentary order. Amid the shrieks of anger he pressed his inquiry with a certain thoughtful suavity. It was obvious that he had made up his mind that

Mr. Asquith should not make his statement on this occasion, and as Mr. Balfour's strength of will was always equal to his polish of manner, it was pretty plain that he would succeed.

Mr. Emmott realised the situation, and put the matter quite clearly to the House. True, the Prime Minister was not strictly in order, but it was sometimes for the convenience of all that latitude should be allowed a Minister in making a statement on an important subject.

"Yes," replied Mr. Balfour, in gracious tones, "but in a case of this kind, it is not tolerable unless there is an opportunity of debate." In the circumstances, there was nothing for the Chairman to do but to decide against the Prime Minister. Grim of face, Mr. Asquith rose and said that he would make his statement on the motion for the adjournment of the House, four hours later.

In the intervening period there was a discussion on the last resolution limiting the life of a Parliament to five years. After it had been passed, each of the resolutions was "reported to the House."

Then there was a great Parliamentary picture. The resolutions were to be the basis of a Bill; and now that the resolutions had been passed, the Bill might be formally introduced. The introduction of a Bill does not entail the production of its provisions, a statement of its title and objects being sufficient. Mr. Asquith, amid loud cheering, rose, and, without any speech, presented "The Parliament Bill, 1910"; a Bill "to make provision with respect to the powers of the House of Lords in relation to those of the House of Commons, and to limit the duration of Parliaments."

“Who is prepared to bring in the Bill?” demanded the Speaker, in due form.

“The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Mr. Churchill, Mr. Haldane, Mr. Joseph Pease, the Attorney-General, and myself.”

Loud cheering broke loose from the New Liberals. Mr. Asquith walked down the length of the House to the Bar.

“The Prime Minister,” announced the Speaker. With a flush on his face, Mr. Asquith bowed to the Chair, and then, in a scene of wild enthusiasm, walked up the floor towards the Table, carrying in his hand the sheet of foolscap which represented the Bill. Scores of Liberals sprang up shouting cheer after cheer. By the time Mr. Asquith had reached the table all the Ministerialists in the House were on their feet, most of them waving hats and handkerchiefs.

On the motion for the adjournment of the House, Mr. Asquith found his opportunity to explain the Government plan. “If the Lords fail to accept our policy, or decline to consider it when it is formally presented to them, we shall feel it our duty immediately to tender advice to the Crown as to the steps which will have to be taken if that policy is to have statutory effect in this Parliament. What the precise terms of that advice will be, it would, of course, not be right for me to say now. But if we do not find ourselves in a position to ensure that statutory effect shall be given to that policy in this Parliament, we shall then either resign our offices or recommend a dissolution of Parliament. Let me add this, that in no case could we recommend a dissolution except under such conditions as will secure that in the new Parliament

the judgment of the people; as expressed at the election; will be carried into law."

The demand for "guarantees" at last! Exultation swept the Ministerial ranks. Liberals, Labour men, and Nationalists shouted and cheered and shouted again. The Lords were warned, the King was warned! What Mr. Asquith's words meant was that unless the King gave the "guarantees," the Government would resign office, instead of going to the country, and would throw on Mr. Balfour the task of government with a minority in the House of Commons.

Mr. Balfour made a slashing, bitter speech, and it was the keynote of the attack which began throughout the country. The Conservative newspapers hurled various charges at the Government, the loudest and most emphatic of them being that there had been a "surrender" to Mr. Redmond. It was wrong to embroil the Crown in the dispute, came from a hundred sources. Why had the King been dragged in? At the same time, there was recognisable a different note in the Conservative outcry; for it was the first time that a great part of the Opposition realised that Mr. Asquith meant business.

On April 28th, 1910, the Budget of 1909 passed through the House of Lords. On Friday, April 29th; members of the House of Commons separated for their Whitsuntide holidays, which were to last till May 26th. Little did any of them think of the event which in the meantime was to deflect the whole course of Parliamentary happenings.

CHAPTER XI

THE CONFERENCE OF EIGHT

OCCASIONALLY in stirring periods of life some staggering event will shake the whole fabric of happenings, past, present, and to come. If this is true with regard to individuals it is no less true in connection with nations. An intelligence outside the recognised universe enters at a pre-arranged moment to throw a conventionally regulated battle into chaos. We may seek the reason vainly enough.

By what might have been well-ordered steps of a carefully constructed play, the constitutional dispute in the United Kingdom had gone on stage by stage, marked first by angry mutterings, then by violent threats, and had been carried to the point where the monarch of the country was to be forced to take a hand in the quarrel between the two great parties of the State. Reluctantly the well-beloved King, popular with every class of his subjects, was to interfere. At first it seemed there might be some escape from the dilemma, but each side was relentless, each pressed on, each believed almost to the last that the other would give in. And then the fateful night of April 14th brought the realisation that the Prime

Minister, backed by a determined army, intended to force the King's hand. Since the days of the Reform Bill, eighty years before, there could hardly have been a more tremendous political ultimatum. "The Government has surrendered to the Nationalists," announced the Conservatives. Even some of the Liberals in their hearts were a trifle daunted by the immensity of the move which had been taken. The colours were nailed to the mast now. The previous cautious retardation by Mr. Asquith began to appear in the light of a strong man's preparation for a strong course.

What were the feelings of King Edward cannot be known in this generation, may indeed never be known at all. One can be sure that he was deeply moved. That he must have been stirred by motives arising from his personal convictions, by the desire to do justice between the different sections of his subjects, by the claims of his constitutional sovereignty, there can be no manner of doubt. The extremest of partisans realised the delicacy of his position, and there were manifestations of loyalty and affection from all sides in the great community which from the first day of his reign to the last felt King Edward to be friend as well as ruler. Ruthless Liberalism and enraged Conservatism and all that mass of fluctuating opinion in between them, were quite confident that whatever step the King took would be a statesmanlike one, and one commensurate with the emergency.

The Lords passed Mr. Lloyd George's famous Budget on April 28th, exactly a year from the day on which it was introduced. But the Budget was at this moment only an episode. The complacent acceptance of it by the

Peers, now that the country had endorsed it; did not in the least mollify the determination of the New Liberals to break the power of the Lords, and the uncompromising announcement of the Prime Minister on April 14th had filled them all with joy. When on April 29th, the Commons separated for a month's holiday, prefatory to the last and fiercest phase of the historic fight, the situation was as clear as it was thrilling, and the Government men and the Lords men could afford a breathing space before they joined issue in the final burst of conflict.

The King, however, could not shut himself off from the cares and anxieties which must be brought to a head as soon as Parliament met. He had been at Biarritz, and, returning to London on April 27, had a consultation with Mr. Asquith on the following day. It may be assumed that the Prime Minister put before His Majesty the resolute attitude of Liberals throughout the country on the question of the House of Lords. On the following day King Edward had a conference with Lord Morley and Mr. Haldane, and it cannot be doubted that he discussed with them the whole situation, and the chances of arranging a private meeting between the leaders on both sides with a view to talking over preliminaries which might conceivably lead to a settlement. On the day after his interview with Lord Morley and Mr. Haldane, the King went down to Sandringham. Two days later, on May 2, he returned to London. The people of this country will not soon forget the sensation caused in their homes by the appearances of the newspapers on the morning of May 6. In them was given the fact that the King was ill. It was just a formal notification in the following words—

“Buckingham Palace, Thursday evening.

“The King is suffering from an attack of bronchitis, and has been confined to his room for two days. His Majesty’s condition causes some anxiety.

(Signed) F. H. LAKING, M.D.
JAMES REID, M.D.
R. DOUGLAS POWELL, M.D.”

The illness of great monarchs is told to the world always in guarded terms, and not a soul who read that statement but recognised the sinister note in the phrase “His Majesty’s condition causes some anxiety.”

Foreboding lay heavy over all. The suspense was not to last long. On the morning of May 7, the papers, black-lined in token of the news, printed the following—

May 6, 1910.

“His Majesty the King breathed his last at 11.45 to-night, in the presence of Her Majesty Queen Alexandra, the Prince and Princess of Wales, the Princess Royal, Duchess of Fife, Princess Victoria, Princess Louise, Duchess of Argyll.

F. H. LAKING, M.D.
JAMES REID, M.D.
R. DOUGLAS POWELL, M.D.
BERTRAND DAWSON, M.D.”

Parliament was hurriedly called together for a formal sitting in accordance with precedent, and was immediately adjourned again. Telegrams were despatched to the country and abroad to fetch back Ministers and members, and the House of Commons within a week of its dispersal was assembled again, assembled with no thought of party rancour and in sorrowful mood.

On May 11th, the House of Commons paid its tribute to the dead. Mr. Asquith made an oration which moved all who heard it. Those who, till then, had regarded the Prime Minister as a cold and passionless statesman, had a glimpse of another side of the man. No one, of course, could have been in a better position than he to know the qualities of the late King, for it is certain that Prime Minister and monarch must each have been fully seized of the other's difficulties in the political anxieties of the moment, must have had many deep and earnest consultations which the world will never know.

“Of his personal charm, of the warmth and wealth of his humanity, of his unfailing considerateness for all who in any capacity were permitted to serve him, I will only say in this connection no man in our time has been more justly beloved by his family and friends, no ruler in our own or any time has been more sincerely true, more unswervingly loyal, more uniformly kind to his advisers and servants.”

It was at this point that Mr. Asquith's flow of words was for the fraction of a second broken, and the roughness and harshness in his tone as he struggled on through a sentence or two gave a sympathetic House of Commons a hint of the friendship which had existed between the first Minister and his Sovereign.

All calculations were overthrown by the death of the King, and the accession of his successor. The popularity of King Edward, his ready understanding, his long training and experience of affairs during his mother's reign, to say nothing of the years during which he himself had occupied the Throne, gave him a unique power as ruler, but all these equipments notwithstanding, it was

felt that his position as it related to the political situation was one of delicacy and difficulty. How that difficulty and delicacy would be emphasised in the case of a new King was obvious to everybody. And even while the dead sovereign lay in State in Westminster Hall, there were rumours and suggestions of compromise in respect of the political emergency which had been arrested on the eve of its culmination by the tragic end of the central figure. "Why could not the parties come together and discuss matters reasonably, and without heat?" asked the newspapers. "Why not try to settle a great constitutional question by the constitutional method of compromise and agreement?" This was the spirit of the proposals which began to be current. Most of the suggestions of the kind came from the Conservatives; but at the same time, a tendency towards accommodation was shown among what may be called the more moderate supporters of the Government. Conservative journals began to seek the points of agreement instead of disagreement—a rare thing in the political world. Presently a statement was freely made that an informal conference between the heads of the two great sections of the State was to be instituted; but its constitution, its terms of reference, its powers of settlement remained matters of guesswork.

On June 13th, all doubt as to the existence of the Conference was set at rest by Mr. Asquith, who in answer to a query in the House of Commons said: "In matters of this kind, the newspapers know so much better than we ourselves of what we are doing and writing, and thinking, and feeling, that it is very difficult to keep pace with their illuminating revelations. I am in a position to say to the House at this moment, and I am afraid it will not

strike them with any air of novelty, that within the last week, certain communications have passed between myself and the right honourable gentleman, the leader of the Opposition (Mr. Balfour), which I hope may lead, at an early date, to a meeting between us.

Here are the names of those who were selected to form the Conference—

Liberals.

Mr. Asquith.

Lord Crewe.

Mr. Lloyd George.

Mr. Birrell.

Conservatives.

Mr. Balfour.

Lord Lansdowne.

Lord Cawdor.

Mr. Austen Chamberlain.

It was an interesting eight. Lord Lansdowne was of course leader of the Conservatives in the House of Lords. In Lord Cawdor had been chosen a man who may be called the business aristocrat, a blunt and fighting politician, who from being chairman of the Great Western Railway Company had become First Lord of the Admiralty in Mr. Balfour's administration, and who, in opposition, had by his lusty commonsense and downrightness, become a warm favourite in the party. On the other side was Lord Crewe, the leader of the forlorn little band of Liberal Peers, a tall and slender man, graceful and gracious in tone and manner, possessed of a quiet energy, and of that frigid decision which enabled him to address defiance to the army of Conservative Peers with every punctilio of politeness. Mr. Birrell, on the other hand, was of a quite different calibre, a man possessing all of the literary culture of Mr. Balfour, with more than his literary gifts, a natural wit, a genial cynic, and one of the

kindest-hearted men who ever lived, and withal, a very sturdy Radical.

The date of the first meeting of the Conference was June 17, and all the country was agog to know what had been discussed in the room of the Prime Minister. No word leaked out. The official statement issued to the Press, at the conclusion of the meeting, was this :

“ A meeting took place this afternoon in the Prime Minister’s room in the House of Commons between members of the Government and some of the leaders of the Opposition. There were present : The Prime Minister, Mr. Balfour, Lord Crewe, Lord Lansdowne, Lord Cawdor, Mr. Lloyd George, Mr. Birrell, and Mr. Austen Chamberlain.

“ The subject of discussion was the constitutional question. It is understood that deliberations are entirely untrammelled by any limitations or conditions, and that the proceedings throughout will be regarded as confidential.”

The value of the Conference it was felt from the first lay in the fact that it enabled trusted leaders to discuss informally, and with the greatest freedom, the difficulties that lay before them, and to ascertain the opinions of each other in a way which would have been impossible had even the trend of their discussions been subject to subsequent comment. Some time, perhaps, it may be possible to learn something of the talk of these eight statesmen in the period during which they were shut off from the world, but it is a pleasing thought that in the midst of violent controversy the confidential secrecy established by them was adhered to and preserved to the finish of the struggle between Lords and Commons.

The tremendous responsibility that lay on the eight (nothing less than the devising of a modification of the government of this country) was such as to impose caution on any body of men, but statesmen, like other persons, are only human, and it would not have been surprising if in some way or other there had escaped a fragment, a crumb of the conversations, long and intimate, between those eight men striving for settlement. But never was there any incautious relaxation, either through friendship or under the insidious pressure of political acquaintanceship. They met, talked for some hours, and then separated, and that was all the world knew. And never an authorised word came forth to show how matters were progressing.

There had been some grumbling at the Conference, especially among the New Liberals, because it was felt that the precious time was being wasted, that the Peers had been allowed a sufficient period of grace; and there was in addition the feeling that any delay was in favour of the Opposition, that unexpected events might crop up before the constitutional question could be brought to its final drastic solution. Hot-blooded Conservatives too were a little afraid that concessions which they considered vital might be made in the course of friendly negotiations, which would not be made if proceedings were public. On the whole, however, the country approved the plan of the Conference, confident in the knowledge that the decision, whatever it might be, would have to be endorsed by both parties before it became operative. Moreover, there was in all quarters the consciousness that the Conference gave a breathing space to King George, so newly ascended to the Throne.

No doubt a good many of those who expressed the highest aspirations for the success of the new departure, felt deep in their hearts that nothing would come of it, but felt also that it was a capital way to relieve the tension for the moment, and an excellent method of easing the position of the new King.

It is permissible to picture the eight leaders at work, all of them valiant political fighters, all of them bent now not on war but on peace. One can see Mr. Asquith, business-like and definite, showing a pleasant pliancy and a ready understanding of arguments which on the floor of the House of Commons he would have derided and demolished ; and Mr. Balfour lightening discourse with the magic of that gentleness which went with his tenacity. It is not hard to imagine the latter leaning across the table towards Mr. Asquith with outstretched finger, pressing a contention with all his boyish sweetness of manner, and the Prime Minister shrugging his shoulders in a kind of amicable disagreement, and with a twinkle in his eye, telling how his supporters would not for an instant stand what was being proposed. Strong men both, Mr. Balfour was conceivably the subtler, and with all his outward charm, the firmer on the smaller points of the discussion, but in the long run I think it would be found that Mr. Asquith had achieved the most. Then there was Mr. Austen Chamberlain, a master of directness rather than of *finesse*, whose straightforward way of looking at matters and whose temperamental liking for unswerving paths would be of the greatest service to a small body of men met together to deal candidly with each other, and with no party purpose to serve in the ordinary understanding of the term. I can hear him stating

almost crudely the main points in the dispute. His determination and sincerity would inevitably be a considerable factor in the proceedings. As to Mr. Lloyd George, one may be sure that he would not be the perfervid orator of Limehouse, but the persuasive man breathing sweet reasonableness who prevented the threatened railway strike, and united a thousand conflicting interests in the new Port of London scheme. How these men would discuss and re-discuss the hundred side issues, how they would use words of frankness about their own supporters; how in the midst of their serious labours once in a way, they might chaff each other about their Parliamentary utterances, are suppositions which do not require any particularly vivid imagination. Perhaps Lord Lansdowne, the trained diplomat of delicate perceptions and of scrupulous taste in words, a precise, prim man with hawk-like nose, sat next to the heavy-shouldered Mr. Birrell, with his tousled crop of iron-grey hair surmounting that quizzical mid-Victorian face, so expressive of rich humanity and of unmalicious wit. The conversation of this couple alone, throughout the sittings of the Conference, would have made an interesting book. Alas! that book can never be printed. We must be content with knowing of the fascinations of the duologues without being able to experience them. A record of the free and easy conversation of these eight men would have proved a delightful inspiration to generations as yet in the womb of time.

The diversity of the matters talked over by the Conference was no doubt great, but it is certain that quite early the eight men centred attention on the one main topic to which all efforts were subsidiary, and although

there had never been any revelations as to the course of discussion, subsequent events enable one to infer the tendency in the minds of at least some of the leaders. The newspapers were soon guessing as to what was occurring at the Conference, and some of the guesses were, I daresay, pretty near the mark. The *Times* of July 4th made an announcement which seems to me to bear upon it the imprint of probability, though I have no cause to believe that it was inspired. Various statements had been made as to the fact that a provisional understanding had been arrived at between the parties of the Conference, and the *Times*' announcement was connected with these reports. It ran as follows:—

“ Among politicians who desire to discover a means of bringing parties into agreement on the constitutional issue, various schemes are being discussed. One which has been put forward is the suggestion that in the case of a deadlock between the two Houses on ordinary legislation, the Bill should, in the last resort, be sent to a final committee of both Houses for final decision, and that this committee should be so constituted at the beginning of each Parliament as to give the Government of the day the most favoured treatment. This scheme, which originated in Liberal circles, presupposes that in regard to Money Bills the House of Lords would waive the right of rejection on condition that an acceptable authority to rule out tacking was set up, but it does not contemplate any reduction in the numbers of the House of Lords, nor any present change in the constitution of the assembly. The suggestion is that Lords and Commons should nominate an equal number of representatives to the joint committee; that the Commons should be nominated on the same principle that guides the Committee of Selection in constituting committees—that is to say, so as to reflect

proportionally the strength of parties in the House ; and that the Lords should contribute an equal number of Liberal and Unionist Peers."

Month after month the meetings of the Conference went on while the country hoped and trusted for the best. The prolongation of the labours of the eight seemed to justify the belief that their work would not be in vain, and that they had at least arrived at some practical basis. Discounting the surmises of the time, it is safe to assume (from the policy of the Conservatives afterwards) what were the main lines of the two sides of the Conference. The Liberals were firmly fixed on the principles embodied in the Veto resolutions ; the Conservatives, while not objecting to a modification of the powers of the House of Lords, desired to rule out from the operation of any new system certain cardinal measures of legislation on which it was urged the House of Lords should possess a right of forcing an appeal to the country. Scores of conditions and safeguards must have been brought forward between the eight, with a view to harmonizing the requirements of both sides.

In the country moderate Conservatives were full of hope as to the result of the Conference, and it was stated with all the dogmatism born of ardent wish that it was simply impossible for the Conference not to agree to some course since an alteration of the constitution could only be made by settlement between the parties. It should be stated, moreover, that as the Conference approached its end, Conservative newspapers did their best to bring the party to a state of mind which would permit of the acceptance of some, if not all, of the vital principles of the Government proposals, and there

was even a softening towards a modified form of Home Rule.

But the Conference, and I speak of both sections in it, had an enormous difficulty to meet apart from the devising of a practical compromise ; it had the difficulty of securing the adherence of the rank and file on each side to any arrangement which might be arrived at. The conciliators were in no sense plenipotentiaries, and an agreement would have to be endorsed by the two armies.

Only those who had acquaintance with the high feeling prevalent at the time can understand the fragility of the task. A suspicion of undue concession on one side or the other would have spoiled the whole thing, and it would have been something like a political miracle if that suspicion had not arisen from the very fact of an agreement. Ever present in the minds of those eight men must have been the picture of the House of Commons gathered to hear the result of the Conference, a House of Commons which as soon as the result was known might on one side be complacent, but on the other would be almost certainly embittered, and rebellious—possibly maddened enough to overthrow its leaders.

There came at last a period in the Conference when the demands and concessions of the Government had been threshed out, when their ultimatum had by friendly consultation been reduced to its mildest form. Then there arose the question for the Conservative four whether they could or could not accept the terms proposed. To accept them was a tremendous step, to reject them hardly less tremendous. It was freely stated at the time that means were taken to ascertain the opinions of the unofficial

section of the Conservative Peers; and that their reply was, "If we are to be deprived of our powers, let it be done by the constituencies, and not by any Conference." Afterwards was forthcoming a denial that the Peers had been consulted, but whether or no, the argument stated above must have been a very potent one in the minds of the four Conservative members of the Conference. To agree to some novel and unique scheme would have bound the hands of official Conservatives, would at the same time have stood in the way of advantages to be gained by Parliamentary fighting, and would have prevented the forcing of another election when the tide of war might have turned in the direction of Conservatives sufficiently to prevent the Liberal Government from taking the severe course it then proposed. Of course there was something to be said against the refusal of terms, for undoubtedly the Government would demand harsher conditions if, after having been defied to go to the country, they brought about another general election, and as the result of it came back again with a powerful majority.

The final decision was reached at the twenty-first meeting of the Conference held at 10, Downing Street on November 10th, and in the evening the following notification was sent to the newspapers—

"The Conference which has been sitting to consider the constitutional question has come to an end without arriving at agreement. It is the opinion of all members of the Conference that the conditions under which its proceedings have been held preclude any disclosure as to the course of the negotiations or the cause which led to their termination."

When the Conference broke up for the last time, a

Cabinet meeting was hastily summoned, and the failure of the conciliators was announced. One can hear Mr. Asquith, in his deep decisive sentences, telling how now that the peace overtures had failed, the battle must be joined with the least possible delay, that no mercy must be given to the enemy, and that he intended to strike swiftly and to strike home.

CHAPTER XII

THE SECOND ELECTION

SUSPENSE had been the recurring note in each successive period of the struggle between Lords and Commons, and once again when the Conference came to an end the country was left wondering as to the Government's next move, a move which from the circumstances of the case could not fail to be momentous. There is little doubt that the organising brain of Mr. Asquith had planned his progressive course even before the Conference finished its labours, and that the Cabinet accepted that plan on the evening of the day that the eight conciliators met for the last time. But the world at large had no knowledge of the Prime Minister's campaign plans, and there was a good deal of conjecture in the newspapers, especially on the Conservative side. It was surmised in some quarters that the Parliament Bill comprising the much-discussed veto resolutions would be hurriedly pressed through the Commons and sent to the Lords, and that when the latter rejected it a General Election would follow, possibly in December, more likely in January. Liberals, however, were inclined to think that since the Conference had not been able to reach an agreement the situation called for quick and determined action, and that the Government

would at once proceed to a dissolution with a view once more to getting the country's verdict. "If the Conservatives will not accept the terms of compromise offered them in private conference," said the Liberals; "then they will have to be fought on the old issue." The expectancy was intensified by the knowledge that in a few days at most the Government's plan must be revealed.

Meanwhile the Lords leaders were hard at work, the signs of the times not being lost upon them. Some of them had for long recognised that a change was necessary in connection with the Second Chamber, but their influence had been overborne by the vigour of the majority at Budget time, when the legislative claims of the Lords were pressed with much insistence. But the months that followed the Budget election had been sufficient to cool down the greater part of the enthusiasts, and to make the most extreme among them understand that the position and powers they had allocated to themselves were no longer under modern conditions, and in the modern trend of thought, to be reverently upheld. An indication of the new spirit is to be found in the fact that a somewhat reluctant majority was to be found for the opinion expressed by Lord Rosebery in a resolution in March, 1910, that a necessary preliminary to the reform and reconstitution of the House of Lords would be an acceptance of the principle that the possession of a peerage should no longer of itself give the right to a seat and a vote in the Upper Chamber. True, a little band of stalwarts, led by gallant veterans like Lord Halsbury and Lord Wemyss, refused to agree to the resolution, but it was nevertheless carried by 175 votes

to 17. It always seemed to me that the Peers adopted this attitude of abstract self-abnegation, not merely to show they were in consonance with the spirit of the times, but also as a kind of penance for misinterpreting the will of the country with regard to the Budget. Be that as it may, the acceptance of the resolution cannot be regarded as otherwise than an acknowledgment by the Peers themselves that their historic hereditary privilege of legislation must come to an end.

At the break-up of the Conference, with a second general election imminent, it became evident to the Conservative chiefs that they must crystallise their policy on the House of Lords, and present it so that the country should have a clear alternative to the scheme of the Government as given in the Parliament Bill. Swift action was necessary, and it was forthcoming. Parliament was to assemble on Tuesday, November 15, but Mr. Asquith was not to make his revealing statement until later. Losing no time, Lord Lansdowne when the Lords assembled on Tuesday gave notice of a motion inviting the Government "to submit without further delay the provisions of the Parliament Bill for the consideration of the decision of Parliament." On the next day he formally moved the resolution. Promptly Lord Crewe agreed on behalf of the Government to the immediate introduction of the Parliament Bill, so that the Lords might discuss it. He stated, however, that no amendment could be accepted. He would, he said, move the first reading in that very sitting, so that the Lords could take the discussion on the second reading as early as they pleased. The second reading motion was eventually fixed for November 21st. Before that day arrived, however,

the Prime Minister had disclosed the Government plans.

It was on November 18th that Mr. Asquith made his statement in the House of Commons. "The House," he said, "will be prepared for my announcement that the Government has advised His Majesty . . . to bring both this Session and this Parliament to an end.

"It will be in the recollection of the House that on April 14 last it gave its assent by a large majority to the Government resolutions upon the House of Lords. The Parliament Bill was introduced and read a first time; and I stated in language carefully chosen by the Cabinet the intention of His Majesty's Government. After devoting some necessary time to the Budget, we separated for the spring recess with the prospect of a near conflict between the two Houses and a speedy issue. The sudden and unforeseen death of our beloved King for the time being completely transformed the situation. Then the nation witnessed an incident unparalleled in the annals of party warfare. The two combatant armies, already in battle array, piled their arms, while the leaders on both sides retired for private conference. When the House adjourned at the end of July the Conference had already held twelve sittings, and I was able as the mouthpiece of my colleagues to announce that we were all of opinion that it would be wrong at that stage to break it off. Further sittings took place during the recess, and it was only a week ago this morning that it was publicly announced that its members had failed to arrive at an agreement. I am not ashamed to confess that I hoped almost to the last that such an agreement might be found possible. I believe that hope was shared by those who represented both sides of the

House. It has been disappointed. None the less, the experiment was well worth trying. I am glad to be able to record here my deliberate opinion that there never was a more honest and sustained attempt on the part of men of strong and conflicting convictions to understand each other's point of view, to find, if it could be found, an underlying common basis of agreement, and upon that basis to build up a structure with at least the promise of stability and endurance. We all, I know, abandoned our task with reluctance. But why did we abandon it? We abandoned it because we had all become convinced that it was useless to prosecute it further.

“It would be idle surely to propose that an agreement which was found unattainable in such favourable conditions could be hammered out in this Parliament in the din and stress of party collision. What is the result? In these matters the plainest language is the best, however it may grate upon the ear. The result is we revert to a state of war.”

After stating that it would be affectation to pretend not to know what the decision of the House of Lords would be with regard to the Veto policy of the Government, Mr. Asquith said the Government had felt it their duty to advise the Crown to dissolve Parliament at the earliest possible moment.

Three days later when Lord Crewe moved the second reading of the Parliament Bill in the House of Lords to give the Peers the opportunity of expressing their opinion upon it, Lord Lansdowne sprang a surprise. After a speech criticising the Government measure, he moved that the second reading debate should be adjourned, and at the same time he gave notice that

he intended to lay before the House a series of resolutions sketching for the public benefit what the Conservatives were prepared to do. On November 23rd; he brought the resolutions before the House. They were as follows—

“ That in the opinion of this House, it is desirable that provision should be made for settling differences which may arise between the House of Commons and this House; reconstituted and reduced in numbers in accordance with the recent resolutions of this House (the Rosebery resolutions) ;

“ That as to bills other than money bills such provisions should be on the following lines :—

“ If a difference arises between the two Houses with regard to any bill other than a money bill in two successive sessions, and with an interval of not less than one year, and such difference cannot be adjusted by any other means, it shall be settled in a joint sitting composed of members of the two Houses :

“ Provided that if the difference relates to a matter which is of great gravity, and has not been adequately submitted for the judgment of the people, it shall not be referred to the joint sitting but shall be submitted for decision to the electors by Referendum ;

“ That as to money bills such provisions shall be on the following lines—

“ The Lords are prepared to forego their constitutional right to reject or amend money bills which are purely financial in character ; provided that effectual provision is made against tacking ; and provided that if any question arises as to whether a bill or any provisions thereof are purely financial in character, that question be referred to a joint committee of both Houses, with the Speaker of the House of Commons as chairman, who shall have a casting vote only.

“ If the Committee hold that the bill or provisions in

question are not purely financial in character they shall be dealt with forthwith in a joint sitting of the two Houses."

Lord Lansdowne explained his reasons for making the proposal. "These resolutions are offered by us as the best substitute which we can provide for the scheme in the Government's Bill. The resolutions are obviously in the nature of an outline, and I daresay I shall be told of a vague and general outline. But will the House bear in mind that we are precluded by the distinct intimation made to us from the other side from dealing with the Parliament Bill by way of amendment? The noble Earl (Lord Crewe) told us in specific language that to attempt such a course would be waste of time. On the other hand it is quite beyond our power to produce within the limits of the time at our command a full, elaborate and carefully considered bill dealing with the subject. We are, therefore, thrown upon resolutions which must obviously be of a somewhat vague and general character."

Lord Crewe washed his hands of the resolutions, but did not divide the House against them. Then Lord Rosebery made a proposal. "I move," he said, "if it be not against precedent, or even if it be against precedent, that these resolutions and those moved at my instance be communicated to the House of Commons." This was agreed to. It was the retort dramatic to the Government.

On all sides there was the realisation of a short sharp contest, and both parties flung themselves passionately into the struggle. The Conservatives fought the more recklessly in that they had the not very popular cause of the House of Lords to sustain. Many were the

divergencies from the main line of attack for the purpose of turning the Government's flank. One paper printed a list of extracts from Mr. Lloyd George's speeches in the effort to prove that he was "vulgar," and many persuasive articles and many damnatory articles were published for the purpose of showing how, if the Parliament Bill were passed, the country would be under the government of the House of Commons alone, and how tyrannous that government would prove.

The great outcry of course was against Home Rule, of which the Veto Bill was the acknowledged precursor, and the Opposition seized on the return of Mr. John Redmond with campaign funds from America, and shouted the message of it to the skies. The Irish Nationalists had for a great while derived much of the funds for party expenditure from sympathisers among their fellow-countrymen across the seas—in Australia, in Canada, and particularly in the United States. The latter had for generations been the principal receiving ground of emigrants from Ireland, driven by the poverty of their own country to seek sustenance and prosperity in foreign lands.

They or their descendants had always responded readily to the call for money made by those fighting the battle for self-government at home. And such assistance was quite necessary to keep together and in fighting order the Nationalists who, to the number of nearly four score, represented the larger part of Ireland in Parliament and kept to the front the demand for Home Rule.

On this occasion, Mr. John Redmond, the leader of the party, had been the ambassador to the voluntary exiles across the ocean, and he came back on the eve of

the election with cash or promises to the extent of £40,000. Here was the very thing for the Conservatives. They seized on Mr. Redmond's collection for party funds as something which might conceivably win them the election. Saying little about the issue of Lords versus Commons; which the Government were anxious to keep to the front, they declared in effect that Mr. Redmond, possessing by means of Nationalist votes in the House of Commons the balance of political power, had threatened and bullied the Government into providing an avenue for Home Rule, and that the £40,000 was to keep the Nationalist party while it carried out its sinister coercion and secured the passage of Home Rule. "Britain bought by foreign gold," was the kind of language portrayed on the hoardings; and there were lurid descriptions of how the British Constitution with its centuries of great traditions was to be demolished by American dollars. Mr. Redmond became "The Dollar Dictator," and the election was "the Dollar Election." Many votes were undoubtedly secured by so excellent an election cry, for it provided just one of those bogies which, though they never preserve their terrors for long, serve their purpose very admirably in the shape of a temporary effect on the man in the street. The alarmists were quite undisturbed by the Liberal answer that if £40,000 could upset the balance of the British Constitution it was in the power of hundreds of individuals all the world over, if they should be so minded, to provide that sum and more for the purpose. A single enemy of Great Britain who chanced to be moderately rich could quite easily, if £40,000 would effect the object, destroy the foundation of our country by writing out a cheque.

Parliament was prorogued on November 28th; and by December 20th the general election was over. The result was as follows :—

Ministerialists 398

Conservatives 272

Majority 126

Thus the Government had come back as strong as before, and the position of the Lords party had been very much weakened, because the Parliament Bill itself had been placed definitely before the electors, and (it must be presumed) had been approved by them. There were the usual outcries of a defeated party by the Conservatives, but the hard fact remained that Mr. Asquith had been returned to power with a solid majority of 126 to back him up in what measures he chose to take with regard to the House of Lords. The favourite cry of the Opposition was that whereas they were a united and single party, Mr. Asquith's following was a hotch-potch one, made up not only of Liberals but of Nationalists and Socialists. It became a kind of accusation and developed into a fervid grievance. Of course there was no great depth in the complaint. Mr. Asquith's majority was composed of those who were adamant with reference to the policy on which he had gone to the country, namely, that in respect of the House of Lords; and it might easily be argued that the solidity of the New Liberals, consisting of different sections bound together with a common aim with regard to the Lords had a homogeneity as much to be respected and certainly quite as potent as the union to be produced by ordinary party discipline.

In the first effervescence of the results, Conservatives declared that there must be another election; since the appeal to the people just made had had no decisive result—the majority being almost the same as before. But this kind of protest soon died away. It had, of course; no basis in reason. The position of the Lords party was well exemplified in that of a man who having been knocked down by an antagonist, and having risen to his feet and having been knocked down a second time, then declares the fight is a tie; because the position is the same as it was before he rose after the first blow.

There could be no doubt as to what line the Government would take, no doubt that the Parliament Bill would be the main business of the session. King George, reading his first speech from the throne in the House of Lords, on February 6th, said : “ My Lords and Gentlemen, Proposals will be submitted to you without delay for settling the relations between the two Houses of Parliament, with the object of securing a more effective working of the constitution.”

The debate on the Address furnished evidence of the advance in opinion made amongst those who, only a few years before, would have been out-and-out supporters of the most far-reaching claims made by the Peers. Mr. Balfour himself did not hesitate to express the general feeling : “ I believe there is nobody in this House who does not think the time has come for some modification of the relations between the two Houses, or who does not think the time has come for an alteration in the constitution of the Second Chamber.” He made it quite clear, however, that the Conservatives regarded the

irreconcilable attitude of the New Liberals as not likely to be conducive to a permanent and peaceful settlement. "You forget," replied the New Liberals in effect, "that the Peers have been irreconcilable for generations; that they are now only beginning to be reconcilable because the country has made up its mind to strip their power from them."

The Parliament Bill was introduced into the House of Commons on February 21st by Mr. Asquith, and the discussion on it covered not only the general ground of the advisability of some alteration in the Constitution, but also special points and features in the Bill itself. The Conservatives centred their attack on the preamble, which in a preface to the Bill promised a reconstitution of the House of Lords in the hazy future. These were the words of the preamble which gave rise to much comment and criticism, then and afterwards—

"Whereas it is expedient that provision should be made for regulating the relations between the two Houses of Parliament—

"And whereas it is intended to substitute for the House of Lords as it at present exists a Second Chamber constituted on a popular instead of a hereditary basis, but such substitution cannot be immediately brought into operation—

"And whereas provision will require hereafter to be made by Parliament in a measure affecting such substitution for limiting and defining the powers of the new Second Chamber, but it is expedient to make such provision as in this Act appears for restricting the existing powers of the House of Lords—

"Be it therefore enacted. . . ."

When was this new constitution of the House of Lords

to be carried out ? asked Mr. Balfour. Could it be that the preamble was but a pious expression intended never to be translated into action and introduced solely for the purpose of quieting those supporters of the Government who believed in Two-Chamber Government; and not in Single-Chamber Government ? Would it not have been more reasonable to alter the House of Lords first; and define its powers afterwards; rather than to reverse the process ? Besides—and this was his main point—the deprivation of the Lords' powers would leave the Commons supreme, and this would mean that there would be Single-Chamber Government in this country until the Lords were reconstituted on the new basis. He showed how the interval would be occupied by the Government in pushing through legislation; such as Home Rule, which, above all other legislation, would call for the functions of a Second Chamber. "Are we to wait," said Mr. Asquith; "for relief and release from an intolerable and even dangerous situation—a situation immediately created by the action of the House of Lords between 1906 and 1909; a situation which placed not only legislation but finance at the mercy of an irresponsible and indissoluble authority, increasingly actuated by the most naked partisanship—are we to wait until, after what must be a long and laborious process, we evolve a new Second Chamber, possessing in its size and composition the qualities which are needed for the impartial and efficient discharge of the functions; and the only functions, appropriate to such a body ? "

Vivacious, enthusiastic, determined were those who from that day onward battled over the Parliament Bill in the House of Commons, and the watcher of those struggling men moved by different ideals, ambitions, and

passions had material for the study of the humanities. Of all the figures in that lively play, none was more interesting than that of the silent listener who presided over the principal debates. Mr. Speaker Lowther, who if the Bill became law would by its provisions be laden with extraordinary new responsibilities, could say no word about the measure, had to hear extravagant praise of it and equally extravagant denunciation, to remain silent through all, and at the same time to guide and control the debates which would settle great constitutional duties upon himself and his successors. Often have I seen Mr. Lowther sitting back in his chair with half-closed eyes and mouth firm-pressed in thought, watching the contending parties, noting their furious arguments, and forming conclusions of which the world will never hear. By reason of his many-sided nature Mr. Lowther was always a remarkable man. Never was he more interesting than in those long hours of silent reflection during which the leaders of the parties and the private members were declaiming what he would or would not have to do under the new condition of things.

No sketch of Parliamentary history during these eventful years would be complete without something more than passing reference to Mr. Speaker Lowther. I am by no means certain that the very fact of his natural gifts, of his diverse personality, did not have something to do with the inclusion of the Speaker as part of the machinery of the Parliament Bill. The Speaker of the House of Commons is not only the guardian of its honour and privileges, its spokesman on tremendous occasions of state, is not only its guider and controller in matters of routine and procedure, the expert who has to administer

the religiously preserved precedent of centuries, but is also the man who has to rule, regulate, soften and reprove over six hundred members, most of whom have decided individualities of their own. Not all the Standing Orders that ever were thought of would enable a Speaker to guide the British House of Commons unless he were possessed of strong human qualities, of strong British qualities. Common sense must be the outstanding thing in him ; after that must come deep knowledge of constitutional matters, and not less important, firmness, tact, swiftness of mind, and good humour. If he should have a touch of wit, so much the better. Sternly impartial must he be ; and he must always combine the traits of judge and friend. Speakers, being but human, have varied, but they have nevertheless for centuries past possessed some at least of the great essentials, and they have at frequent intervals stepped out into the white light of English history. Parliament in recent times has been particularly fortunate in her high officers, but among all the old Parliamentary hands I have met, there is practically universal agreement that Mr. Lowther is in many respects the greatest Speaker in living memory ; and even allowing for the enthusiasm of the moment, there is good reason to think that his qualities will give him a place in the permanent memoirs of the nation. Mr. Lowther was a Conservative, and he became Speaker under a Conservative Government. Quickly did his powers become apparent. He divested himself of every fraction of party feeling, and upholding the rights of minorities, showed himself as ready with sympathetic counsel to the obscure private member as he was with severe repression for the more prominent politicians who

were at all overbearing; and who outstepped the bounds of order.

Mr. Lowther was a fine upstanding figure of an Englishman—erect, athletic, with well-poised head, clear blue eyes, and trim brown beard. Externally he was always good to see. Never was there a man whom the daily knee breeches, buckled shoes, black gown and deep flowing wig suited better, and the visitors who came to the House of Commons always kept the memory of the Speaker's procession in the afternoon, heralding his occupancy of the Chair and revealing the well-knit, manful individual in whom alertness marched with dignity. Mr. Lowther's test came when in 1906 the House of Commons was flooded with a majority of the New Liberals; many of them fresh to Parliamentary life; all of them hotly impatient to do things, and several of them scornful at ancient form and ceremony. If ever tact was needed it was needed then. Here was a Radical House of Commons such as had never been known in history, and in the Chair was a Conservative Speaker, bound to impose certain trammels which could hardly fail to chafe and irritate many who would be subject to them. Most people know how Mr. Lowther rose to the occasion; how his kindness and firmness, his sense of humour, his sparkling common sense, soon put him into a position with the new men, which he never failed to hold with all after a few months' acquaintance. Of faults Mr. Lowther probably had his share, but they were inconsiderable, and such as they were, they tightened his hold over the Commons. For instance, I have seen at very rare intervals a flash of temper upon him at some particularly flagrant offence, and I have sometimes suspected that

despite his great self-restraint he did not suffer bores very gladly. But it is not going too far to say that he endeared himself to every section of the strong-tempered Parliament of 1906, and that in succeeding Parliaments he increased his popularity. Mr. Lowther's presidency of debates was a delight to witness. An occasional interjection during a speech cannot be prevented, and sometimes a Minister will pause and reply to some question that has been flung at him. But necessarily there is a limit to these interruptions. One day a Minister was being bombarded with questions and comments from various parts of the House. "Order, order," cried the great body of members, in token of the respect due to the rising in his place of the Speaker. "I would like to remind honourable gentlemen," said Mr. Lowther, looking towards the enthusiasts, "that we are engaged in a debate and not a conversazione." I remember on another occasion at the close of a question time, during which a pertinacious member had failed to draw replies from a Minister, that the former somewhat angrily asked the assistance of the Speaker. "Is it not a fact, sir," he inquired, "that any member of this House may put a question to any Minister so long as that question refers to the work of the Minister's department?" "That is so," said the Speaker, "any member has a right to put a question to a Minister"—applause from the member and his friends—"but though every member has that right, the Minister has also a right—the right to answer or not, as he thinks fit."

Towards the close of the Parliament of 1910, Mr. John Rees, a Liberal member for a Welsh constituency, had been knighted, and had shortly afterwards crossed

the floor and joined the Conservative party. The New Liberals were derisive. When Sir John Rees rose for the first time to ask a question from the Conservative side Mr. William Redmond sprang up, and with grave expression put a point of order to the Speaker. Was it in order, he asked, for a member who had just been knighted through the Government to cross the floor to the Opposition and put a question on the last day of the session? The House rippled merrily. Sir John Rees blushed. The Speaker rose to reply to the point of order amid cheers. "It is never too late to mend," he remarked.

But Mr. Lowther had sterner qualities, and they were no less appreciated by all the members. I witnessed the defiance of the Chair by Mr. Victor Grayson, the young Socialist, and saw the flush rise to the Speaker's face at this outrage on the dignity of the House. No softness was there in him then: "Sergeant-at-Arms, remove the honourable member," he cried in a great ringing voice; which will live in the memory of all who heard it. I have been present on several occasions on which he has ordered a member to cease speaking because of continued irrelevancy or repetition; and I have heard him put Ministers and ex-Ministers in the wrong as fearlessly as he would the most unknown offender.

This, then, was the man who had been chosen by the Government as the umpire in the future as to what was a money bill and what was not a money bill. Under the Parliament Bill, the powers of the Lords with regard to the two classes of measures would be very different; for whereas they were compelled to pass a money bill within a month of its being sent up to them, they had the

power of retarding other bills for two years. The Speaker, whoever he might be, was by virtue of his office the nominal guardian of the privileges of the Commons. The impartiality of Mr. Lowther, the admiration and affection he had inspired in all parties and in all sections, had something to do, consciously or unconsciously, with the selection of the holder of his office as the arbiter between the two Houses of Parliament.

CHAPTER XIII

THE CHALLENGE OF THE COMMONS

THE fight on the Parliament Bill in the House of Commons was interesting, sometimes exciting, but never sensational ; for the Government's plan of campaign and the superiority of their forces gave the other side no chance of victory, and drove them to a kind of rearguard action, in which they could only hope to snatch small incidental advantages, and to hamper and hinder the Ministerial scheme of movement in the anticipation of some providential catastrophe later on.

Animation was seldom lacking from the debates, and in spite of the fact that there could be but one result, Parliamentary observers (only too frequently bored by the process of legislation making) had hardly a dull hour throughout the proceedings. How was dullness possible to a person who knew the rudiments of history and who had within him a glimmer of imagination ? Here was the British House of Commons setting itself of deliberate intent to take away the privileges of the Peers, the dominant caste in the nation. It is a matter of comparatively narrow speculation as to how far back one would have to go to find the time when such a course of action on the part of the Commons would have caused the Lords

to draw the sword and set civil war afoot. Now they were little more than pained and protesting spectators. The calm, businesslike way with which the Commons carried through the details of their work of history-making had its own fascination. Peers came and looked at them from the gallery over the clock, and went away again apparently wondering if it was a real world they lived in.

The second reading of the Parliament Bill, that is to say, the endorsement of its main principles, was passed on March 2nd by 368 votes to 243, and on April 3rd began the Committee stage, which permitted the discussion and alteration of the measure word by word. Here were opportunities for skirmishes and manœuvres innumerable, and the Conservatives availed themselves of these opportunities to the full. Mr. Asquith made himself the Minister personally in charge of the measure, and Mr. Balfour led the Opposition. The first lieutenant of the Prime Minister, namely, Mr. Lloyd George, was absent from the House during the fight through ill health, and his place was taken by Mr. Churchill, the Home Secretary. Mr. Churchill's dash, aggressiveness and intellect had lifted him into a position of great prominence in the Ministry, and somehow it seemed in accord with the fitness of things that during Mr. Asquith's unavoidable absences from the debates, Mr. Churchill should assume captaincy, and become the leader of the House. He was only thirty-seven, and had already made himself a real force in Parliament. His boldness, his love of fighting, his unquenchable energy, his brain power, his ready knack of making himself offensive to his enemies, added very much to the interest of the proceedings of the House of Commons. One of the remarkable things about the

young statesman was his devotion to Mr. Lloyd George. Their close companionship in and out of Parliament was a feature of political life. One was the son of the people; coming from a lowly stock and rising to great position by natural genius, the other was the born aristocrat; brought up in circles where the word "Radical" probably caused shudders among those who heard it. Mr. Lloyd George as a boy was under the care of his shoemaker uncle; Mr. Churchill was the son of that brilliant and erratic Conservative, Lord Randolph Churchill, high in the Parliamentary firmament. These were the two men now so closely bound together, not only by political aim, but also by personal friendship. They would always sit together on the Treasury Bench; they could frequently be seen together outside the House. It was a strange combination—and, to ardent Radicals, a fascinating one. They dreamed dreams and saw visions of what those two men working together would accomplish in the future.

Though in some respects Mr. Churchill was the lesser man, yet Conservatives disliked him far more than they did Mr. Lloyd George. Human nature plays a large part in Parliamentary life, and it is not at all surprising that Conservatives should have carried the remembrance that Mr. Churchill was once in their own camp and had left it to go over to the enemy. Add to this the fact that Mr. Churchill was never one to turn his other cheek to the smiter, that he was a master of exacerbating phrase, and that pugnacity was part of his nature, and you will understand the angry episodes which occurred during the time that Mr. Churchill took the place of Prime Minister in leading the House. Engaged on a variety of important

matters pertaining to his department; Mr. Churchill had not taken a very important part in the Parliament Bill discussions till the committee stage was reached.

The Home Secretary was a perpetual study for those who have an interest in men. He was an infant prodigy among statesmen, and he somehow looked the part. His clean-shaven face was round like that of a schoolboy, his nose seemed slightly tip-tilted, and in his merry moments a dimple appeared in each of his cheeks. At such times he was the mischievous boy—and that in spite of his frock-coat. But from this mischievous boy there would suddenly spring the hard man of affairs, obstinate, domineering, offensive, and highly capable. Again there would be a transformation, and the young statesman would become an old man bowed down with responsibility, who, seated with hunched shoulders on the Treasury Bench, and poring over documents with the aid of a pair of spectacles, showed to those in the gallery above a head as bald as that of many a man of sixty.

The back-bench Conservatives frequently laid themselves out to attack Mr. Churchill in order to show him that they still considered him a rather ill-mannered youth of no particular ability, who had left his own party for the sake of what he might get in the other party. None of his opponents were a match for him, but they were quite able to give him some very unpleasant periods, and it was plain to see that Mr. Churchill, notwithstanding much strength of will, was sometimes hard put to it to preserve that Parliamentary balance of manner which is essential in a highly-placed statesman. As a rule, however, he got through all right. I remember one sitting when there was very much turmoil. The Conservatives adopted as

an article of faith the supposition that Mr. Churchill was fundamentally unfit to take command of the House of Commons. They strove to make it appear that he was unfit. Lively incidents of course resulted. On this particular occasion, the younger Conservatives on the one side and the Nationalists and some of the Liberals below the gangway on the other, had worked themselves up to a state of great anger. The Chairman of Ways and Means, Mr. Emmott (one of the most amiable of men) was driven to a kind of petulant desperation by the disorder. Mr. Churchill, striving hard to maintain the dignity of a Minister in charge, with difficulty restrained himself from a joyous entry into the thick of the fray. He looked the embodiment of Puck as he wriggled about on the Treasury Bench, thrusting here and there a word into the general din. Young Lord Winterton was one of the enthusiasts on the Conservative side, and after a period of rival shouts, he burst out, "Send for the Speaker; send for some one who will keep order." Mr. Emmott rose with a very severe aspect. "If the noble Lord does not cease those cries, I shall have to deal with him." Quite unrepentant was Lord Winterton. "I rise to a point of order," he said; "I desire to call your attention to the fact that there are continuous disorderly interruptions from honourable gentlemen below the gangway, and by the Home Secretary, who is in charge of the House, and I am compelled to call for the Speaker from the fact that they have not been once called to order from the Chair." "That is not a point of order," said Mr. Emmott severely. "Then," cried Lord Winterton, "I shall continue to call for the Speaker." Uproar ruled for a few moments, and, in the midst of it, Mr. Churchill rose. His tone was

that of one of the mildest-mannered men who ever prosed before the House of Commons. "I am sure I made no disorderly interruptions. If the noble Lord thinks I have, he should have raised the question of order instead of making interruptions." Lord Winterton was up with fierce words at once. "I must distinctly accuse the right honourable gentleman of making the most disorderly interruptions." All this while there were eddying cheers and ejaculations from various sections of the House. Many personal charges were flung across the floor. Mr. Churchill tried to get in an explanation; but Mr. Peel, who was technically in possession of the House, would not give way to him, and the Chairman had to rule that the Home Secretary was not in order. He sat down and waited his time. The circumstances connected with the commencement of Mr. Peel's speech (interrupted by the foregoing passages) led to further trouble when the speech was over. Mr. Peel had risen with other Conservatives; including Lord Winterton; and Liberals; Labour Members and Nationalists had shouted jubilantly, "Winterton, Winterton, Winterton," the suggestion being that the Chairman should call on the young Lord, more fun being anticipated from him than from Mr. Peel. Mr. Churchill, forgetting that he was a Cabinet Minister, leading the House, could not repress his boyish impulses, and, leaning back in his place, joined in the cry for "Winterton." The Chairman, anxious to quiet the debate and not to stir up further strife, called the name of Mr. Peel, a fluent but not a very stimulating speaker. When he sat down, Mr. Churchill had his chance. "What I wish to say is that I never used a word, nor am I conscious myself of having made any interruption that

was discourteous or disorderly in regard to the speech of Lord Winterton. If I have done so I wish to express my regret for it. I do not believe there is the slightest foundation for the suggestion. He may have thrown that taunt across the floor to cover himself in regard to something he said in reference to you, Mr. Emmott."

Lord Winterton, enjoying himself very much, proceeded amid loud Conservative cheers to make things as disagreeable as possible for the Home Secretary. "My protest," he said, "was directed partly against the right honourable gentleman, and his friends behind him, and most distinctly against himself. My accusation was that the right honourable gentleman indulged in discourteous, and as I think, disorderly interruption. When I rose to address the House, some of the right honourable gentleman's friends barracked me. They called out the name of an honourable member—myself—instead of the constituency he represents. Those cries were led by the right honourable gentleman himself, the present leader of the House of Commons, as I understand. If I was mistaken in supposing that the right honourable gentleman did call out my name, I unreservedly withdraw."

"Perfectly true," replied Mr. Churchill. "Three honourable members rose from those benches, and several honourable members expressed a preference to hear the noble Lord. I frankly admit that I called out the noble Lord's name. That is not a disorderly interruption. Whatever he says, it is not a discourtesy." Lord Winterton protested that Mr. Churchill had "bawled out" his name in a way intended to be discourteous, and Mr. Churchill repeated that he did not mean to be discourteous. Then there was comparative quiet for a few minutes.

But the spirit of the occasion was manifested a little later; when Mr. Claude Lowther, in a brief contribution to the debate, made the comment that one of the Nationalist members had "merged his delightful personality into that of a laughing hyena."

This, then, was a specimen of some of the occurrences during the Parliament Bill fight. Much heat was generated by the discussion. It found an outlet at such periods as those when the powerful personality of the Home Secretary was to the fore. I do not think he was very much hurt. Perhaps, on the whole, he enjoyed it.

Every point of the Bill was attacked by the Conservatives, and, as in the case of all contentious measures, scores of amendments were put down for the purpose of delaying the Government in their progress with their scheme. With much portentousness, these amendments were brought forward. The overwhelming bulk of them were swept away by the Government, who openly and continually stated that they would permit of no vital alteration in their Bill. Some minor changes were, however, accepted. The definition of a money bill was elaborated; and there was wiped out a section which stated that no amendments should be allowed to a money bill which, in the opinion of the Speaker of the House of Commons, was such as to prevent the Bill retaining its financial character. Moreover, a revision was made in Clause 2—the clause which permitted general legislation to be passed over the heads of the Lords if it had been agreed to by the House of Commons in three successive sessions, provided that two years had elapsed between the date of the first introduction of the Bill in the Commons and the date on which it passed the Commons for the third

time. The alteration was that the two years should run, not from the introduction of the Bill, but from its second reading—an alteration which would lengthen the period during which the Lords might hold up the measure.

The constitutional contest in the Commons was remarkable for the debating duels between Mr. Asquith and Mr. Balfour. Both statesmen, endowed with what may be called the political intellect, were both capable at times of lifting themselves above the field of party strife. Naturally there were frequent occasions when they were battling heavily for their respective sides, but there were other occasions when they were raised from temporary considerations by the magnitude of the great questions which were brought up. Mr. Balfour, the gentle philosopher, had the critical and analytical mind, brilliant always in destructive criticism. Mr. Asquith, on the other hand, was the builder-up, the man with the constructive intellect, ready always with balanced phrase and polished argument to sustain the wisdom of new plans. If Mr. Balfour was the more subtle, Mr. Asquith was the more practical and certainly the more lucid. He saw things in a sharper light than Mr. Balfour, and made others see them in the same light. Mr. Balfour was concerned to show that the illumination was not always to be relied upon, that it distorted things and took them out of their right perspective.

The topic with which the two leaders had to deal was a great one—namely, the methods by which the people of the country should govern themselves. They dealt with it in a fitting manner. It is unwritten convention in the House of Commons that when either the Government leader or the Opposition leader has made a speech, his opponent shall follow him immediately in debate. There

was, therefore, a quick, dramatic completeness in the Parliamentary passages between the two men. An amendment would be moved by a Conservative; Mr. Asquith would rise to oppose it, and he would be immediately followed by Mr. Balfour. Or perhaps, in the course of the committee discussion, a point involving a question of principle would spring up, and Mr. Balfour would take the opportunity of explaining the general constitutional bearings of the matter, and, as a matter of course, Mr. Asquith would speak next in order to give his own views. For instance, Mr. Balfour on the question as to who should decide what was a money bill, objected on broad general grounds to the appointment of the Speaker as the arbiter. "I am an earnest and most faithful believer in the continuity of the traditions of this House. But I do not think that it is going to be an easy matter as time goes on to keep the House what it is now, a model for every legislative assembly in the world, if you overburden the man upon whom the order and dignity of the House is dependent."

Should what is known as a money bill—say a measure for imposing taxes—be of such a nature as to impose social and political changes on the country? That was the constitutional question which Mr. Balfour and Mr. Asquith set themselves to debate one evening. "With few exceptions," said Mr. Asquith, "there has hardly ever been presented to the House a money bill which is not open to the charge that it was not wholly or in part political in its character or object." Mr. Balfour would not have it.

"This House," he said, "ought not under the guise of finance to set to work to modify the social life of the

countryside in either a good or bad direction." From the stores of their knowledge the two leaders quoted great authorities against each other; Burke was brought up, Professor Dicey, Sir William Anson, and many others. But, generally speaking, Mr. Asquith and Mr. Balfour did what was more interesting, they drew their own deductions from past and present experience, and gave the House new thoughts on their own accounts.

What do the people mean at a general election? That was one of the riddles they put to themselves. It arose from the intention of the Government to pass Home Rule under the lee of the Parliament Bill. Mr. Asquith contended that plain statements of intentions by Ministers on various occasions during an election were sufficient if they were again returned to power to enable them to claim that the country had endorsed the policy stated. The weak point in this was immediately shown by Mr. Balfour. "The most we can hope for, at a general election, is that the country shall give some broad decision in favour of a particular party, perhaps even of a particular leader. That is very often, though not always, associated with a general expression of approval of one particular line of policy on one particular subject. That is really all you can hope to get at a general election."

One of the big fights between the two men was in respect of the Referendum. In a remarkable speech, Mr. Balfour urged the growing danger of the rigid party system, the recent tendency of Governments to make a hostile vote on any matter a question of life and death; and the resulting danger to continuity of administration. An appeal to the people on a rare occasion of some great issue, and joint sittings of the two Houses of Parliament

on smaller matters would; he argued, be all to the advantage of the State now and in the future. Admitting some of the present disadvantages, Mr. Asquith made an eloquent defence of the existing representative system. "Why has it stood the test of time and experience? Because in the first place it gets rid of what would be otherwise an intolerable difficulty, the difficulty of submitting every trumpery, trivial and everyday occurrence to the decision of the vast masses of the people. A second reason much more important is that it enables people to choose specially qualified men as their representatives, having tested their qualifications."

One of the most notable speeches was that in which Mr. Balfour maintained that the House of Commons of the present was equal in character and capacity to the House of Commons of the past. Liberals, Labour men and Nationalists all joined in the cheers. With flushed face Mr. Asquith rose from the Table and said, "I think that speech is one of the finest vindications of the representative and independent character of the House of Commons ever made in this House."

On May 15th, the House of Commons passed the third reading of the amended Bill. In the course of the discussion Mr. Asquith repeated his answer to the suggestions that the Government once having passed the Parliament Bill would not proceed with the re-construction of the House of Lords. "Our party interests and our political fortunes are really bound up in this new scheme with re-construction of the House of Lords upon such a basis as will enable it to do even-handed justice between both parties. I have stated more than once and repeat here—and this is the last opportunity I shall have of doing

so—that it is the intention of the Government to undertake that task in the lifetime of the present Parliament.”

This is the Parliament Bill as it went up from the Commons to the House of Lords :

A BILL

INTITULED

An Act to make provision with respect to the powers of the House of Lords in relation to those of the House of Commons, and to limit the duration of Parliament.

Whereas it is expedient that provision should be made for regulating the relations between the two Houses of Parliament :

And whereas it is intended to substitute for the House of Lords as it at present exists a Second Chamber constituted on a popular instead of hereditary basis, but such substitution cannot be immediately brought into operation :

And whereas provision will require hereafter to be made by Parliament in the measure effecting such substitution for limiting and defining the powers of the new Second Chamber, but it is expedient to make such provision as in this Act appears for restricting the existing powers of the House of Lords :

Be it therefore enacted by the King's most Excellent Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, and Commons, in this present Parliament assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows :—

1. (1) If a Money Bill, having been passed by the House of Commons, and sent up to the House of Lords at least one month before the end of the Session, is not passed by the House of Lords without amendment within one month after it is so sent up to that House, the Bill shall, unless the House of Commons

direct to the contrary, be presented to His Majesty and become an Act of Parliament on the Royal Assent being signified, notwithstanding that the House of Lords have not consented to the Bill.

(2) A Money Bill means a public Bill which in the opinion of the Speaker of the House of Commons contains only provisions dealing with all or any of the following subjects, namely, the imposition, repeal, remission, alteration, or regulation of taxation ; the imposition for the payment of debt or other financial purposes of charges on the Consolidated Fund, or on money provided by Parliament, or the variation or repeal of any such charges ; supply ; the appropriation, receipt, custody, issue or audit of accounts of public money ; the raising or guarantee of any loan or the re-payment thereof ; or subordinate matters incidental to those subjects or any of them. In this subsection the expressions "taxation," "public money," and "loan" respectively do not include any taxation, money, or loan raised by local authorities or bodies for local purposes.

(3) There shall be endorsed on every Money Bill when it is sent up to the House of Lords and when it is presented to His Majesty for assent the certificate of the Speaker of the House of Commons signed by him that it is a Money Bill.

2. (1) If any public Bill other than a Money Bill is passed by the House of Commons in three successive sessions (whether of the same Parliament or not), and, having been sent up to the House of Lords at least one month before the end of the session, is rejected by the House of Lords in each of those sessions, that Bill shall, on its rejection for the third time by the House of Lords, unless the House of Commons direct to the contrary, be presented to His Majesty and become an Act of Parliament on the Royal Assent being signified thereto, notwithstanding that the House of Lords have not consented to the Bill : provided that

this provision shall not take effect unless two years have elapsed between the date of the second reading in the first of those sessions of the Bill in the House of Commons and the date on which it passes the House of Commons in the third of those sessions.

(2) When a Bill is presented to His Majesty for assent in pursuance of the provisions of this section, there shall be endorsed on the Bill the certificate of the Speaker of the House of Commons signed by him that the provisions of this section have been duly complied with.

(3) A Bill shall be deemed to be rejected by the House of Lords if it is not passed by the House of Lords either without amendment or with such amendments only as may be agreed to by both Houses.

(4) A Bill shall be deemed to be the same Bill as a former Bill sent up to the House of Lords in the preceding session if, when it is sent up to the House of Lords, it is identical with the former Bill or contains only such alterations as are certified by the Speaker of the House of Commons to be necessary owing to the time which has elapsed since the date of the former Bill, or to represent any amendments which have been made by the House of Lords in the former Bill in the preceding session, and any amendments which are certified by the Speaker to have been made by the House of Lords in the third session and agreed to by the House of Commons shall be inserted in the Bill as presented for Royal Assent in pursuance of this section :

Provided that the House of Commons may, if they think fit, on the passage of such a Bill through the House in the second or third session, suggest any further amendments without inserting the amendments in the Bill, and any such suggested amendments shall be considered by the House of Lords, and if agreed to by that House, shall be treated as amendments made by the House of Lords and agreed

to by the House of Commons, but the exercise of this power by the House of Commons shall not affect the operation of this section in the event of the Bill being rejected by the House of Lords.

3. Any certificate of the Speaker of the House of Commons given under this Act shall be conclusive for all purposes, and shall not be questioned in any Court of law.

4. Nothing in this Act shall diminish or qualify the existing rights and privileges of the House of Commons.

5. Five years shall be substituted for seven years as the time fixed for the maximum duration of Parliament under the Septennial Act, 1715.

6. This Act may be cited as the Parliament Act, 1911.

CHAPTER XIV

THE CONSERVATIVE PLANS

ON May 15th the Commons passed the third reading of the Parliament Bill ; and on the same evening in the House of Lords Lord Lansdowne moved the second reading of the Bill to re-construct that chamber. This was the Conservative counter-stroke. It was rather more than that ; it represented the high-water mark of the spreading and reluctantly increasing opinion (continually gaining ground since the rejection of the Budget) that heredity alone should not give a man the right to legislate for his country. Long had the Radicals vehemently asserted this, long had moderate men in their hearts acknowledged it, and now the official Conservative party was stating definitely that modern thought had rendered the possession of purely hereditary legislative powers an anachronism. In our national narrative the " House of Lords Reconstitution Bill " of Lord Lansdowne will be a remarkable chapter.

This state of affairs had been reached with what may justly be called amazing suddenness considering the immensity of the issue. A brief ten years before, the suggestion that the hereditary privileges of the Lords should be destroyed would have been met with derision by the Conservatives—and I daresay by a good many Liberals,

True, for many generations there had been sporadic outbursts against the Peers, true that Mr. Gladstone himself on the rejection of the second Home Rule Bill, in 1893; sounded the trumpet note against the Lords, true moreover that in 1907 Lord Newton, a vigorous and unconventional Peer, put forward a Bill for the reform of the House of Lords, and that on the same occasion Lord Cawdor moved for the appointment of a select committee to consider suggestions for improving the efficiency of the Upper Chamber. But in all these movements there was no effective force. Anger, expediency, policy were equally impotent to touch what might be called the established order of things, that order of things recognised as immutable or practically immutable through all the democratic strivings of the past century; the state of affairs which meant the permanent maintenance—under the guidance of Providence—of the caste-inspired in the high seats of Government. Our very virtues as a nation sometimes incline us in the direction of snobbery. The poor we have always with us; and we feel deep within us that Heaven has so ordained things that the families with the noblest of souls and the best of brains shall always rule over us. Masters of philosophy and doctors of science would have been among the most horrified ten years before at the dissolution of the hereditary privileges of the House of Lords. As for the Peers themselves (most of them estimable gentlemen in private life—among them a sprinkling of distinguished statesmen) they would have been almost paralysed with indignation at the announcement that within the lives of nearly all of them the majority of the House of Lords would sympathetically discuss the second reading of a bill introduced by the Conservative

leaders for the purpose of taking away the divine right of heredity.

What, then, was responsible for the tremendous change of attitude revealed by the action of the Conservatives in 1911? It sprang, I think, in the first place from the ever-growing cumulative influence of a forty-years system of education among the mass of the population. Gradually a new sense of proportion was permeating the community—particularly the part of it made up by the vast mass of work-a-day people, ranging from the intelligent poor half-way up through the middle classes, the people who owing to their daily wrestling with life, do not have a permanent enthusiasm in politics. Slowly these people were refusing to take things for granted. And this applied equally to those brought up amid Conservative prejudices as to those brought up amid Liberal prejudices. Progress was being made in the common mind. Notwithstanding this, no sign of new thoughts and aspirations was to be found for many years among those who constituted the Governments of the country. It happened, therefore, that when the New Liberals were defied by the Lords the democratic forces joined battle with fervency; while a good many sturdy Conservatives, though striving for the Upper Chamber, had some private qualms as to the ground of their fight. Dormant doubts were stirred into activity, even among those who upheld the Lords most strongly. To those among the Conservatives who felt genuine uncertainty about the hereditary principle were added a great army (to be found on every political side) guided by expediency alone, who saw that heredity as such would no longer be accepted by the majority of people as an equipment for law-making and the administration of the

Empire. As the result there came into being a mass of opinion, even among that portion of the electorate avowedly opposed to the change, in favour of some alteration in our Second Chamber. The matter was pressing. Shrewd party leaders saw that the New Liberals had not only brought affairs to an issue, but were filled with resentment and were determined to settle the House of Lords difficulty in their own way. It was recognised, moreover, that the strategical advantages were with the attackers. They had driven the Peers into the open. Something had to be done, and done at once to show the country that the Conservative party was just as anxious for reform as their opponents—only it must be well-considered reform and fair reform, not the mad rush for revengeful revolution led by Mr. Lloyd George. Thus was born the Conservative policy with regard to the House of Lords. Bit by bit it was revealed, first in rather nebulous form, but latterly as a connected whole—clear, understandable, comprehensive.

During 1910 it was urged with a show of virtue that the Rosebery resolutions indicated the willingness of the House of Lords to reform itself, and then just before the election, the Conservatives annexed the principle of the Referendum as part of their solution. Accordingly in the beginning of 1911 the position of affairs was this: the Conservatives had put forward as an alternative to the proposals of the Parliament Bill a scheme which included the re-construction of the House of Lords and a settlement of differences between the two Houses by means of joint sittings and, in cases of necessity, the reference of any particular political question to the electorate of the country. The New Liberals derided these suggestions. They declared that the Lords, frightened by the Parliament

Bill, were making desperate efforts to avert their fate, and they fell on the Conservative programme tooth and nail, and set to work to tear it to pieces by argument and ridicule. An incessant fusillade was directed on the point that this presumably far-reaching arrangement, with its surface appearance of fairness, still kept up the overwhelming Conservatism of the House of Lords, still maintained the dominance of the Peers, still retained for them their mastery of the situation in the event of a struggle between the two Houses. The Liberal leaders asserted, moreover, that the Conservative programme was far more revolutionary than the Parliament Bill, since it proposed not only to alter the constitution of the House of Lords, but also sought to introduce into the British Constitution a new and untried element in the form of the Referendum. Blandly the Conservatives asked, "Do you really object to an appeal to the people about a point on which the two Houses have disagreed? Surely the people of the country should be allowed to govern themselves." Pell-mell came the objections and arguments in reply. "To refer a single bill to the country is to destroy the whole system of representative government under which members are elected for their adherence to general lines of policy, and because of their general fitness to exercise discretion with regard to particular measures. Take away the powers of Members of Parliament to carry through important legislation (which is what your proposal comes to) and you take away from them at once all responsibility, rob them of their dignity, of their power of judgment, and of a great part of their sense of duty. In effect you reduce the House of Commons to a debating society. There can be no big measures carried against the people's will, inasmuch as

under the five years' Parliament set up by the Parliament Bill no Parliament will; as a matter of fact, sit for more than four years."

Thus the battle went on. The Conservatives claimed that since a change was necessary, their change was by far the better. "No," said the New Liberals, "because in spite of your elaborate devices, birthright and privilege will still reign above all." "Nonsense," was the reply of the Conservatives; "we are prepared to act perfectly fairly and even to take you into consultation with regard to the new Constitution." "Too late," announced the New Liberals; "you had your opportunity of a compromise during the Conference last year. You then refused it and you must now take the consequences. We will discuss, if you like, the reconstitution of the House of Lords a little later, but in meantime we are going to remedy, by means of our Bill, the manifest unfairness which the Liberals suffer under the House of Lords. Even by our new scheme we shall be far worse off than the Conservatives will be, but, at any rate, our work for the country will not be absolutely stultified."

Faced by a resolute Government who were backed by united supporters in the Commons, the Lords were in a very difficult position. A blank defiance to the terms of the Parliament Bill could not be accepted for a moment as the sole policy of the Upper Chamber. Statesmanship—to say nothing of party exigencies—called for far more than that, especially in view of the fact that only a month or two before on the eve of the election the Lords had passed resolutions providing the outline of an alternative policy. Moreover, the House had already accepted the principle of Lord Rosebery's proposal that heredity alone should not give the right to membership. So steps were

taken either by the official leaders of the Opposition or by individual members of it towards the formulation of definite measures embodying their ideas. The first move was made by Lord Balfour of Burleigh, who brought in a bill to set up the Referendum in this country. It was called the "Reference to the People" Bill. Lord Balfour was a genial hard-headed independent Scotsman; whose sincerity added weight to all his words. On previous occasions he had proved to be quite unafraid of standing alone when his views did not coincide with those of Lord Lansdowne and the official Conservatives. He was just the man to bring forward such a measure as the "Reference to the People" Bill, because so far as he was concerned there was no question of a mere party manoeuvre. Deeply moved by the gravity of the constitutional conflict, he thought he saw in the Referendum one of the avenues to peace and mutual understanding.

The second reading of the Bill was moved on March 28th. The measure did not receive an enthusiastic reception. Ministers were unbendingly hostile; and from the Conservative benches there was an acquiescence which was not very eager. After a wide range of views had been made manifest the second reading debate was adjourned; a method of postponement equivalent to the abandonment of Lord Balfour's proposals for the time being. I give a few of the clauses of the bill as a matter of historical interest.

"When any bill for a public general Act of Parliament (in this Act referred to as a 'rejected bill') is passed by the House of Commons and is sent up to the House of Lords before the first day of July in the session in which it is so passed, but the House of Lords rejects such bill or

fails to pass such bill within forty days after it is so sent up to that House, or passes such bill with any amendment to which the House of Commons will not agree, such bill shall be, on the demand of either House of Parliament, submitted to a poll of the Parliamentary electors of the United Kingdom (hereinafter referred to as 'a poll of the Parliamentary electors') in manner provided in this Act, and in the form in which such bill was passed by the House of Commons."

"When any bill for a public general Act of Parliament (hereinafter referred to as a 'carried bill') is passed by both Houses of Parliament, and a petition signed by not less than two hundred members of the House of Commons praying that such bill may be submitted to a poll of the Parliamentary electors in manner provided in this Act is presented to the Crown, such bill shall be submitted to a poll of the Parliamentary electors in manner provided in this Act and in the form in which such bill was passed by both Houses of Parliament."

"If the total affirmative vote in the United Kingdom shall exceed the total negative vote therein by not less than two votes per centum of the total negative vote, the bill to which the poll of the Parliamentary electors related shall forthwith be presented to His Majesty for assent in the form in which it was submitted to the poll of the Parliamentary electors, and a rejected bill shall, upon the Royal assent being signified thereto, become an Act of Parliament in like manner as if it had been passed by both Houses of Parliament, notwithstanding that the House of Lords have not consented to such bill."

"No person shall vote in more than one constituency at one and the same poll of the Parliamentary electors, and the poll of the Parliamentary electors of the United Kingdom in all the constituencies in the United Kingdom shall be deemed to be the same election within the meaning of the enactments relating to personation and to voting, and the question which may be asked of voters at the poll shall be: 'Have you already voted here or elsewhere

at this poll of the Parliamentary electors of the United Kingdom ? ” ”

“ The returning officer shall cause a copy of the Bill printed by the King’s printers in the form in which the same will be submitted to the poll of the Parliamentary electors to be deposited for public inspection at the office of—

- (a) The clerk of the peace for any county, riding, or division of a county in England, Wales, or Ireland comprising any constituency or part of any constituency for which he is the returning officer ;
- (b) The principal sheriff clerk in any county or district or division of a county in Scotland comprising any constituency or part of any constituency for which he is the returning officer ;

not less than seven days before the day appointed for the taking of the poll of the Parliamentary electors, and such copy shall be kept in the office in which it is so deposited until the poll has been taken, and shall be open to public inspection at all reasonable hours. The principal officer of the public bill office of the House of Commons shall, on the request in writing of the returning officer, supply him free of charge with such number of copies of the bill as he may require for the purpose of this section.”

The discussion on Lord Lansdowne’s bill for the reconstruction of the House of Lords was more elaborate and in certain respects more significant than that on the Referendum bill. The Referendum, it is true, had been adopted in principle by the Conservatives, but the leaders of the party had not made themselves responsible for any definite scheme for carrying it into effect. On the other hand, Lord Lansdowne’s bill was the formal specific plan of the Conservative party as represented by their chiefs for the re-formation of our Parliamentary system. There had always been two distinct sides to the problem, one being

in connection with the relation between the two Houses of Parliament and the other the composition of the Upper Chamber. The Government's measure and Lord Balfour's Referendum bill dealt with the former, Lord Lansdowne's bill with the latter. Persistently had the Conservatives argued that the constitution of the Second Chamber should be decided on before a start was made with the reform of its relations with the Commons. Lord Lansdowne's Bill came before the country, therefore, as the first great step in the policy of the Opposition. I give the official memorandum showing very clearly the outline of Lord Lansdowne's proposals.

“ This bill has for its object the reconstitution of the House of Lords.

“ It is provided that a writ of summons shall not be issued to any Lords Spiritual or Temporal (other than a prince of the Blood Royal) unless he is elected or appointed as a Lord of Parliament under the Act.

“ The House of Lords as reconstituted would contain rather less than three hundred and fifty members, composed as follows :—

100 Lords of Parliament elected by the whole body of hereditary Peers from among those hereditary Peers who possess any of the qualifications set out in the schedule.

120 Lords of Parliament elected for electoral districts to be formed by commissioners throughout the United Kingdom—the election to be by electoral colleges composed of the members of the House of Commons for constituencies within each electoral district.

100 Lords of Parliament appointed by His Majesty on the advice of the Ministry of the day, in proportion to the strength of parties in the House of Commons,

- 7 Spiritual Lords of Parliament; consisting of the Archbishop of Canterbury, the Archbishop of York, and five Bishops elected by the Archbishops and Bishops of England and Wales.

- 16 Peers who have held high judicial office."

"The term of office of a Lord of Parliament would be twelve years, one fourth as nearly as may be of each category retiring every third year. The order of retirement of those first appointed would be determined by ballot. The two Archbishops would sit during tenure of their respective sees. Peers qualified by high judicial office would sit for life."

"Elections under the Act are to be conducted in manner to be settled by order in council and so as to secure representation of minorities."

"The creation of new hereditary peerages would be limited to not more than five in any one year, but this provision is not to prevent an hereditary peerage being conferred upon any person who is already an hereditary peer or who holds, or has held, the office of Cabinet Minister."

"A Peer unless a Lord of Parliament would be eligible for election to the House of Commons."

The schedule set out among these hereditary peers who would possess qualifications for election—Cabinet and ex-Cabinet Ministers, various Ministers or ex-Ministers below Cabinet rank; Governors-General or ex-Governors-General, Privy Councillors, ex-Members of the House of Commons, officers in the Navy down to the rank of Captain, and in the Army down to the rank of Colonel; those who had held high position in Government Departments; diplomats above a certain status, and those who were or who had been Lord Lieutenants, Lord Mayors and Chairmen of Quarter Sessions.

When the Bill was introduced, Lord Lansdowne made

a very clear exposition of its provisions and also of its aims. "The situation which confronts us is a most extraordinary situation, created by the conduct of his Majesty's Government in dealing with this great constitutional question. His Majesty's Government have from the first admitted that a measure of House of Lords reform was necessary and desirable. Their whole case arises from their complaint that this House, because it has not been reformed, has obstructed the action of the House of Commons and has been an insurmountable barrier as they say in the way of useful legislation. And in the speech delivered from the Throne by his late Majesty, they bracketed together as inter-dependent subjects the two questions of reform of the constitution of this House and an amendment of the procedure to be followed between the two Houses in the case of differences arising between them. Though they made this initial admission they now persist in dealing separately with the two branches of the case. . . ."

"Our position is a wholly different one. We are convinced that no lasting settlement on this great constitutional question, no balanced reform of the Constitution is possible except with a re-constituted Second Chamber. And we hold that an amendment of the constitution of this House should proceed as far as possible *pari passu* with a reform of the relations between the two Houses. Indeed, I should almost venture to go further and say that if one of these questions is entitled to priority over the other the reform of this House should come first, because surely it is not possible to decide what sort of powers, what sort of authority you shall give to any assembly until you have some idea at all events of the

manner in which that assembly is going to be composed. . . .”

“ We desire now by embodying our policy in a bill to lay it chapter and verse before the country and to show that a reform of this House on reasonable lines is possible and I hope, also, that this House is not unwilling itself to undertake the task.”

The responsibility of replying for the Government fell on Lord Morley—plain John Morley of times long gone by—who had become the leader of the Upper Chamber owing to the illness of Lord Crewe, the previous leader. Scholarly hesitation generally marked Lord Morley’s utterances, and their tone, moreover, was always all that could be desired in the shape of courtesy. Notwithstanding this he was by temperament uncompromising—coldly but gently uncompromising. “ His Majesty’s Government responsible for the deathblow to the House of Lords ! ” he remarked, in tones of mild surprise; “ I want to remind your Lordships of what happened in November, 1909, when your Lordships took the step of rejecting the Budget. Immediately after that it was not by the action of His Majesty’s Government but by the action of my noble friend on the cross benches (Lord Rosebery) and some noble Lords on the benches opposite that you got up and told this House and country that this House was unwieldy, too numerous, and so forth, and was, in fact, not fit to perform the function and duties which the Constitution entrusted to it.”

The second reading debate produced some piquant speeches. Rumblings of discontent came here and there from the Conservative benches, and if the measure had been one emanating from a Government with a prospect of being passed into law, I think open revolt would have

broken out. Among many of the "backwoodsmen" peers there prevailed the quite natural feeling that Lord Lansdowne was going even further than Mr. Asquith. Under the Parliament Bill the legislative power of the Lords would be clipped but their social privileges would remain the same, and there was the further consideration that all members of the House of Lords would suffer the common lot, leaders and followers; all would retain their respective positions. But under Lord Lansdowne's measure a great number of members would be swept out of the Chamber altogether, and in the new House would be many who could by no means be considered as caste-worthy. Lord Lansdowne seemed to me to realise the revolution he was proposing, and capable, clear-headed statesman that he was, gave one the impression of a man depressed by his task. He was to a certain extent proposing to destroy his own order. I think he realised it.

The discussion among the leaders in the House reached a high level; and though among the "backwoodsmen" it was often commonplace, real feeling was freely displayed. The shrill-voiced Duke of Northumberland was one of the most outspoken. Throughout he had been one of those who had used strong expressions. If not very inspiring, his words were honest and human, and represented a distinct but dying type of assertively aristocratic intellect. "Democracy," he declared, "is simply that kind of Government which invariably prevails in one form or another in the decay of the State."

The Government, while disagreeing with many of the proposals in the Bill, declared that they recognised in it a great step forward on the part of Conservatives. On May 22nd, the Bill was read a second time without a division.

CHAPTER XV

THE FIELD OF BATTLE

THE Conservatives hoisted their flag in the knowledge that for a time they must be beaten back by the victorious New Liberals, but they made it plain that they did not intend to accept the repulse as a final defeat, and openly declared their determination to demolish the Government scheme when they were returned to power. Of course they intended incidentally to make the onward progress of their opponents as difficult and as protracted as possible, and if the fortune of war should unexpectedly put a favourable chance in their way before the end of the campaign, they resolved to seize it for the purpose of overthrowing Mr. Asquith. Some, indeed, of the more militant were for standing their ground and defying the Government to the death. The idea in the minds of the Conservatives as a body was a stubborn retreating fight, with preparations the while for the destruction of the New Liberals' emplacement as soon as the future general election should transpose the strength of parties. Under the coming Conservative majority the re-construction of the House of Lords with its resulting modification between the two Houses would sweep away the Parliament Bill and

all its works. Meanwhile the Bill had not yet become law, said Conservatives with a shrug of the shoulders.

How far the Lords would carry the defiance of the Commons was the topic of discussion in political circles for weeks beforehand. Every one knew they would propose wrecking amendments, but no one knew whether they would press them to the extent of causing the Prime Minister to advise the King to make several hundred fresh Peers in order to force the measure through.

The widespread stage of British politics has rarely had more attraction for thoughtful observers than at the time when the Commons, having passed the Parliament Bill to abolish the ancient legislative powers of the Lords, sent it up to the Lords for formal passage together with the threat that they must pass it or take the consequences. The Peers were undoubtedly in a tight place. Conscious of inherent weakness in their body, knowing that they had been at least to some extent condemned in the two preceding elections, they were nevertheless sensible of injustice, sensible that a vast proportion of the community supported them in practically all they did or chose to do ; and with this they possessed the realisation that they were in the power of a merciless Government, helpless as children unless by some heroic expedient. What the country was eager to know was whether this heroic expedient would be forthcoming. Perhaps never, in the history of the world, has a great legislative assembly been in such a position as that in which the Lords found themselves at this period. They had to settle among themselves how far they should use the powers yet remaining to them to stultify the Bill which sought to take those powers from them ; and what was even more important, to settle whether in view of the

careful and deadly plans of the Government, those ancient powers would be sufficient to crush the Bill. No doubt there were divided counsels at the time ; that was inevitable in a matter of such complexity. In spite of this a definite policy presently emerged.

But what of the attackers, watching every movement of the Lords at this time with fierce eyes ? The ardent, unforgiving New Liberals were ready for drastic action. They were not very much concerned whether the Lords took the line of aggression or fell back in weak retreat ; all their thoughts were bent on attaining their object, and the method mattered little. They mingled taunts with demands for surrender. Surging joy was in their breasts at the realisation that at last the birth-proud legislators who had trampled them underfoot were tremendously defeated, were shouting with rage, were standing with their backs to the wall. " No mercy " was the cry of the New Liberals.

The commanders on both sides of the Commons were silent, but their very silence revealed the alertness with which they were waiting on events. There was Mr. Lloyd George, who, after organising the initial attack, had continued to direct it with characteristic virility up to a point from which success was certain. He was actively at work now with a comparatively uncontentious National Insurance bill, and he seemed far too busy and practical a statesman to give any more attention to the constitutional struggle. This devotion to other legislative work would have led a stranger to believe that he had now really very little interest in the contentions of Lords and Commons, that he was immersed in considerations affecting social life among the poorer classes, and had no time for

such abstruse matters. And yet Mr. Lloyd George was watching the situation steadily; studying the prospect; prepared for all the chances. With all his other occupations he was, I fancy, one of the liveliest of the Cabinet enthusiasts. It is possible to see him putting aside his Budget and Insurance thoughts, and throwing himself into the work of heartening some of his colleagues, to the formulation of further measures against the peers if they should prove obdurate, and to the preaching of the gospel of extreme courageousness to the more respectable of his associates. At this time, as always, Mr. Lloyd George was, I think, the most formidable of all the Lords' opponents. His searching scrutiny never left them.

Then there was Mr. Churchill looking on, filled with malicious pleasure at any prospect of the Lords showing fight, ready to go even further than the Chancellor in bringing them to the dust. The thousand problems of the Home Office, the complex measures of legislation which were in progress under his guidance did not, I am sure, keep his gaze off the struggle at the other end of the Parliamentary corridor. Mr. Churchill was an excellent man to have on one's side in a fight to the finish with the Powers-that-be; for he was quite regardless of risks, and his anger was of that type which prolongs its assaults and sets about crushing enemies with a certain murderous glee. Avid and ready was Mr. Churchill; prepared for the worst.

Amid the waiting watchers was Mr. Asquith, the man who held in his breast a secret at once tantalising and all-significant. He alone knew whether the King had given the much-discussed guarantees for the creation of fresh

Peers in case the House of Lords did not pass the Bill. No one else had an inkling of the matter, and Mr. Asquith was like a sphinx. Whatever the party anxieties, his lips were sealed for the time by reason of loyalty to his monarch; and of the constitutional practice which, while enforcing the acceptance of Ministerial advice by the sovereign, prevents Ministers from announcing beforehand exactly what that advice may be and the contingencies arising from its acceptance or refusal. Inscrutable was the Prime Minister, and only by his complacency were observers able to draw any deduction. An extraordinary mental experience must have been Mr. Asquith's as, knowing all he knew, he witnessed the excitement among his own supporters, the manoeuvres of his opponents, listened to the unending storms of words from the back-benchmen on both sides, and read the fevered newspaper surmises as to what was going to occur. He alone knew what would happen if the Lords did not pass the Bill. On the advice he gave to King George would follow consequences which the Macaulay of the future would probably commemorate. And with all there was no sign of perturbation on the face of the Prime Minister as he came down to the House of Commons day after day, answering questions with his icy humour, and listening with an air of indifferent interest to the discussion of the various Parliamentary business for which, as chief of the Government, he was responsible. Mr. Asquith and his thoughts at this time would make a subject fit for the pen of the greatest of those who have analysed human emotion and individual destiny.

On the other hand there was Mr. Balfour, outwardly untroubled, but undoubtedly using all his skill, not merely

to find a way out for the Lords, but to preserve the fighting strength of Conservatism so seriously threatened if the Parliament Bill became law. Perhaps we shall not know in the present generation all the efforts Mr. Balfour put forth; I am convinced they were very great. It is necessary to remember what he was fighting for. Temporary party ends were no doubt of value to him as they are of necessity to all party leaders, but on this occasion he must have recognised that he was engaged in a contest for the soul as well as the body of Conservatism. The Liberal leaders had brought about a state of affairs in which the vital ideals of the Opposition were to be crushed as they had not been crushed within living memory. How soon they would recover was a matter of conjecture; but it was safe to say that not soon could they get back the same vigour, the same influence, and the same actual material power. Phoenix-like a new Conservatism might rise from the ashes of the old, but that was no concern of a statesman who had not supernatural gifts of prevision. His to prevent the present evil, to avert what was apparently to be a fatal blow to the basic creed of his party.

I have used the word Conservative instead of Unionist throughout, because I felt that the struggle of the Opposition in both Chambers sprang from the vital tenets of what is very properly called Conservatism. It is impossible comprehensively to describe in a few words any political creed, but one may sketch current Conservatism as the opposition to violent changes in affairs of State, opposition very often to any change at all, and correlatively the encouragement of natural development or evolution in affairs affecting the commonwealth. Conservatism

admitted great inequalities in the social life of the people, but maintained that under any condition of things, mankind being what it is, inequalities must exist; and that though amelioration should be one of the aims of statecraft, high-flown notions of remedying hardship by sweeping legislation were likely to prove dangerous rather than helpful. "Slow change" was the secret of progress. The vast complexity of society as it existed was not to be straightened out by a few weeks or a few months discussion at Westminster. The rich and powerful had their duties, the great armies of the poor had their sorrows, but suddenly to unbalance society through making life harder for the upper classes by disturbing their equilibrium, so to speak, would have the effect of causing indirectly additional discomfort and possibly wretchedness to the masses. Here, then, in a rough and ready way, was the tendency of Conservatism.

The House of Lords was bound to be wrapped in Conservatism, not only the Conservatism I have referred to; but Conservatism of a closer texture, that which still retained more than a trace of the old doctrine of authority as opposed to democratic freedom of choice. Conservatism in the Commons necessarily felt and was influenced by the trend of opinion in the country, but Conservatism in the Lords was of stiffer fibre. The party was rather proud of the latter because they said that the Peers, being unafraid of public opinion, stood firm for principle. Theirs not to be afraid of elections. Clamour outside left them unmoved. The Liberals retorted that they were also unmoved by modern enlightenment, by the softening education of the community's thought and sympathy, and that their arrogance and impermeability was due not only

to the fact that they did not have to subject themselves to election, but also to the fact that their method of entering the Chamber by being the eldest sons of their fathers did not make for superlative ability in matters of government. To this the upholders of the Lords replied that though heredity was not, perhaps, an absolute equipment for legislators, it might be a valuable part of such equipment in a Second Chamber. They put forward the traditions of noble families, the way succeeding generations had devoted themselves to public service and how *noblesse oblige* was still a very real factor in the conduct of our public affairs. Mocking Liberals produced a list of legislative measures which the House of Lords had killed on account of the interests which would have suffered from their passage into law, and pointed out how the Lords as the undeviating agents of official Conservatism took care always to preserve the interests of the "Haves" against the "Have nots." "You are merely angry because some of your party's bills have not been passed," said the Lords. It was claimed for the Upper Chamber that its value lay in its independence of outlook, and its long-distance vision towards the welfare of the country.

It has to be remembered that the Liberal party were the great innovators. The Conservative party were those who stood in their way crying "Steady, steady." The faith that moves mountains, the impetuosity that faces any odds and cleaves a way, these made up the motive powers behind Liberalism. A British steady common sense, a prejudice against sentiment, a real fear of hasty injustice, these may be taken as the inspiration of modern Conservatism. The position of

that Conservatism when the Parliament Bill went up to the House of Lords was a very serious one. In politics as in war, a certain advantage rests with the attackers. To attack was one of the governing principles of Liberalism. But the advantage to be derived from taking the initiative was more than counter-balanced by the fact that a Conservative House of Lords stood in the way of all Liberal legislation. It was stated with much emphasis that this state of affairs was obviously unjust, because when the Conservatives were in power in the House of Commons, their measures would be passed quickly and without demur by the Lords, and when the Liberals were in power the principal and characteristic measures of the Government would be destroyed by the Lords. This was met by Mr. Balfour with the statement that as the Liberals were the party of initiators, it was only to be expected that their proposals should be delayed by a Second Chamber, the functions of which were essentially revision and delay. There was, perhaps, something in this argument, although for Liberals it was rather vitiated by the memory of legislation affecting sectional interests passed by the Lords under the Conservatives.

From these considerations emerges the situation which Mr. Balfour had to face. The Parliament Bill was to be the instrument by which Radical legislation of a fundamental character would be driven into law. By means of it the House of Lords as the base of the Conservative machine was to be split and shattered. Not only was the Conservatism of the moment staggered by the proposal; but, far, far worse, there was to come a succession of terrible shocks whenever the Liberals were in power.

Nothing would be safe. The future to Mr. Balfour presented a vista of legislative volcanoes darkening the sky; scorching, sterilising, fissuring all the fruitful earth beneath. This was not like the passage of a single measure, the ill effects of which could be measured by its own dimensions. Ages to come must inevitably feel the results of this catastrophic Parliament Bill. One of the first things in the mind of Mr. Balfour and other Conservatives was Home Rule. For twenty-five years hatred of Home Rule for Ireland had welded the party together in the strength which we all know, had drawn into the Conservative camp many able Liberals, and had, after the passage of years, unified them in a common army. From that hatred of Home Rule there had actually sprung another name for the political creed. For years past Unionist had almost supplanted the word Conservative, and the Unionist Party was now the official designation of what was in reality the Conservative Party. Conceive then the feelings of Mr. Balfour when he realised that the first measure which would be passed into law under the new state of things was avowedly to be a Home Rule Bill. The consultations between leaders became frequent, and it was forecasted that their course of action was to be a desperate one. At first it was believed that the House of Lords would throw out the Parliament Bill when it was brought up to them for second reading, but later it became known that subtler methods were to be employed, that the second reading was to be passed and that action would be taken when the Bill reached the committee stage. Then when each clause and each line was under examination the text would undergo alterations which would minimise the immediate dangers and perhaps provide some safeguards for the

future. "We will endeavour to improve the Bill," said the Lords. Liberals set their lips firm.

Before the Bill reached the Lords an addition had been made to the weak Liberal forces there. Illness had kept Lord Crewe from his duties recently, and Lord Morley had become the leader of the Liberal cause in the Upper Chamber. He and the Lord Chancellor were the only statesmen of high accomplishment and intellectual eminence left to do battle with an imposing array of opponents. On each side of Lord Lansdowne there extended a line of statesmen who had given prominent service to the State; some of them who had achieved fame in the past, some who hoped to achieve it in the future. Lord St. Aldwyn was there, the prim independent statesman of acid speech who held office long ago under Mr. Disraeli, and twice since then Chancellor of the Exchequer; Lord Halsbury, ex-Lord Chancellor, close friend of the late Lord Salisbury and still a sturdy fighter in spite of his eighty-six years; Lord Cross, another old statesman of renown; Lord Ashbourne; Lord Curzon; Lord Selborne; and many others. On the cross benches were Lord Cromer and Lord Rosebery, as sternly critical of the Government as any member on the Conservative side. And the only men of note to oppose all these were Lord Morley and the Lord Chancellor. The approaching debates in which the Government scheme would have to be upheld against attack from many sides, necessitated some strengthening of the Liberal advocacy. That was how it came about that Mr. Haldane, the War Secretary, solid lawyer and thoughtful philosopher, was promoted to the Peerage. He left the Commons to fight their battle in another place, and there can be no doubt

that his presence in the House of Lords was a substantial gain to the Government. Merely from the physical side the strain on Lord Morley would have been almost intolerable without further help. And so it came about that when on May 24th Lord Morley moved the second reading of the Parliament Bill, there were three prominent champions of Liberalism to meet the array of statesmen on the other side and their massed supporters behind them.

In the House of Lords the Lord Chancellor, who is the Speaker of the assembly and the presiding officer, is not and cannot be an impartial non-party man like the Speaker of the House of Commons. The post of Lord Chancellor makes him a member of the Cabinet, and he is consequently an exponent of the Government policy. There is, moreover, the fact that though he nominally presides he has no control or direction of proceedings such as is possessed by the Speaker in the Commons. The formal announcement of a motion to the House and the announcements consequent upon the taking of a division almost sum up his duties during a sitting of the House. An imposing figure in flowing robe, deep wig, knee breeches and buckled shoes, he carries an air of command as he sits on the Woolsack in front of the throne, but the experience of an evening is sufficient to show an observer that he has no real power so far as the conduct of the proceedings are concerned. He does not rule noble lords out of order, he does not even name which Peer shall speak when two or three rise together. Helpless is he in the knowledge that he is not allowed to confer precedence, or impose reproof. But as though to make up for the lack of these judicial functions he is permitted to take a share in the debates and to speak on the Government side as a Cabinet Minister. All he

has to do on these occasions is to step to the left of the Woolsack and thus silently indicate that he is no longer even in form the unbiassed president of the Chamber. In the circumstances this was a very great help to the Government, because Lord Loreburn, the Sir Robert Reid of old time, was a very able combatant and one whose high position had not sapped a drop of his strong Radicalism. His words were measured but uncompromising. He feared not to speak plainly to dukes of the most ancient lineage. Facing the crowded Conservative benches, he would tell the noble lords in unequivocal words that they were wrong, and with forefinger uplifted would prophecy very straightforwardly the fate which they were bringing upon themselves by their assumptions of caste-power and their refusal or their inability to share even temporarily their opponents' point of view. Such a man was necessarily of much import to the Government in the House of Lords. He had the opportunity, when the House went into committee and the Chairman presided over the gathering instead of himself, of taking his place on the Government Front Bench, together with his Cabinet colleagues, and of speaking from that part of the House as though he had no connection with the Woolsack at all. But when all is said Lord Loreburn was but one of a pair, and two men cannot fight an army. The other Minister was Lord Morley—the John Morley of Gladstone's time. Student, philosopher, writer and Radical, he was ageing by this time, his thin body was becoming almost frail, his shoulders were a little bent, his voice, even in his most important speeches, was rarely raised beyond conversational pitch. But there was still the old intellectuality about those pallid features, although his face was becoming sharper and more peaked

with the growth of years. Vigour of mind he still possessed in full measure ; he was never at loss for thoughtful repartee, always ready with the quiet deft argument in reply to the fighting speeches or strong ejaculations from his Conservative enemies ; and his speeches, though delivered with a certain scholarly haltingness and with a weakness of tone which did little more than carry them across the Table to the principal Conservative Peers, were nevertheless full of cogent reasoning and always marked by that precision of moderate language which separates a cold thinker like Lord Morley from those men, some clever and some not so clever, who struggle for epigram to illustrate their meaning.

To Lord Morley and the Lord Chancellor was now added Lord Haldane. He again was a man of many attainments. A distinguished lawyer, he had dabbled in philosophy, and "Haldane the thinker" was the light expression by which he was referred to by many of those who had known his work in the House of Commons. As Minister for War he had done extraordinary things in the shape of organisation and new arrangements for furthering the efficiency of our defensive forces. To him belonged the credit of initiating and carrying into effective existence the Territorial army ; and in many directions he had shown what may be called a faculty for thoroughness of thought preliminary to thoroughness of action. He was tactful but persistent. While he was not able to inspire the House of Commons, it is doubtful whether during the time he was there any member of the Chamber possessed in greater measure the purely intellectual gifts. His manner was bland, his burden of knowledge immense. The Prime Minister did well for his party when he sent Mr. Haldane

to the House of Lords to help Lord Morley and Lord Loreburn in fighting through the Parliament Bill, to help them to reply to what would undoubtedly be the strong and continuous criticism from the Conservative Peers.

CHAPTER XVI

THE RE-MODELLED BILL

WHATEVER the feelings of the Lords with regard to the Government's proposals they were far too wise to increase the strength of their opponents' position by the immediate flaunting of a measure which—to go no further—had certainly in its outline been approved of by a majority of the electors. Wavering apprehensions that the Lords would throw out the Parliament Bill complete were quickly set at rest by the announcement that the Peers intended to accept the Bill in principle, and to introduce modifications for the purpose of taking away its pungency.

On May 23rd, the second reading of the Bill was proposed in the House of Lords by Lord Morley, and the first spokesman for the Peers was Lord Midleton, who, rising from the side of Lord Lansdowne, explained why the second reading was to be allowed. This was only a temporary measure he said. Besides, the people of the country undoubtedly wanted some change, and after the action of the House in passing the Conservative proposals for reform it would not be fitting to destroy absolutely even the Government measure, bad as it was. But after the second reading stage was over and the House went into Committee to consider details the Conservatives would have "grave amendments" to propose. Were

such matters as the power and position of the Crown, the establishment of national councils in Ireland, Wales, and Scotland to be left in the hands of a chance majority in the House of Commons? Perish the thought. Moreover, if the House of Lords was not to be a sham there must be some tribunal other than the Speaker of the House of Commons to act as arbiter between the two Houses.

The discussion went on for several days, and on May 29th the House of Lords in a grim and unjoyful mood passed the second reading. When the Lord Chancellor put the formal question from the Woolsack only one Peer broke the silence with a rebellious "Not content."

After the second reading a break of a month intervened because the coronation of King George was fixed for June 23rd, and each party desired to avoid the precipitation of the crisis exactly at the time the King was crowned. For a period therefore the constitutional struggle was put in the background. It was not forgotten. The Government went on making their plans behind the cover of national rejoicing, and the Peers stepped into prominence as part of that glowing picture always presented by the coronation of an English monarch. Such an occasion is one on which the Lords are at their best, for then they are able to make clear their connection with the history of the far past, with the chivalry, the battle spirit and love of kingship which is symbolised in panoply, blazing robes, great jewels, and the apparel of gorgeous war. Might and power and majesty enwrapped the Peers as they came forward to play the parts left to them by their ancestors. And the British people, who, in spite of their practicality, have within them deep springs of sentiment, undoubtedly felt the glow and exhilaration

inseparable from such a time. Political proportion was destroyed; and for the moment the nobles forgot the worries of a carping House of Commons, and gave themselves up to the enjoyment of that prominence which was theirs by birth-right. They showed up well. The claims of Radical politicians sank to insignificance as one saw the assembling of men of great titles at Westminster on the morning of the coronation. It is understandable if under the stimulation of the environment the Peers were rather swollen with importance, felt that they represented an integral part in the life of the nation, and that the acrid critics among the commoner classes were really quite negligible.

The supremacy of caste distinction was well exemplified at Westminster Abbey on the day of the coronation. It was my lot to be present in the annexe, the hall built round the west door, forming for the occasion a part of the abbey itself. It constituted the gathering place of the great nobles, the chamber in which they were to meet His Majesty, and from which they would escort him to the spot where the ceremony was to take place. A real king's ante-chamber was this annexe. Constructed to be in harmony with the abbey it had on its walls priceless tapestry lent for the occasion; and, stacked round its pillars, old-time weapons which had loosed men's souls on stricken fields. On a table at one side of the chamber were the regalia ready to be carried in when the King should arrive. This was the apartment which formed the rendezvous of the rank and nobility of England. Viscounts and barons in their magnificent Peers' robes stood chatting in groups. Tiny page boys in white satin with red-heeled shoes ran hither and thither,

swinging their masters' coronets by their handles of ribbon ; Lord Rosebery talked to a group of bishops ; the Duke of Northumberland balanced the Queen's crown on a cushion in front of him in order that a photograph might be taken of it ; a princess and her retinue occupied some half-dozen of the stools scattered about ; dukes, viscounts, earls, barons, all in their robes of state, were threading in and out continuously. The Marquess of Londonderry came in with his coronet in one hand and two newspapers in the other, and finding a seat for himself, put his coronet on a stool beside him, pushed one of the newspapers into his coronet, and began reading the other. A Peeress came up and chaffed him, and he responded genially, but went on reading his paper. Not far away some dainty girl aristocrats were rallying two male relatives about their coronets, and as to how they should be worn. It is safe to say that in the animated scene nine-tenths of those present held names known in history. Into this gathering walked Mr. Asquith, Prime Minister, the ruler of the country to all intents and purposes for the time being, the maker of Peers, the representative of the United Kingdom before the eyes of the world. No one took any notice of him. Young barons hurried across to speak to fellow-Peers, officers of state held consultations with the Duke of Norfolk, the Earl Marshal ; Peeresses bent their glances towards Lord Roberts and Lord Kitchener, who were standing by the Bishops, but no one appeared to give so much as a glance at Mr. Asquith, or thought him worth more than a moment's notice. Mr. Asquith did not seem to care. He gave a single quizzical glance round the annexe with all its animation, its hereditary glory and its glitter,

he found a stool for himself, and sat down in silent reflectiveness. Once in a way he pursed his strong lips in the manner which characterises him when some dryly humorous thought is crossing his mind. For the rest he was impassive and patient, quite content to wait unnoticed for the arrival of his sovereign. When one of the ladies present, presumably a Peeress, subsequently bowed a recognition to Mr. Asquith, and invited him to her side, it only emphasised the general attitude towards him. Quite evident was it that Mr. Asquith had not the high-caste position which would have justified the nobles in giving him any very definite attention. Not that there was any wilful avoidance of him ; the Peers did not go out of their way to be offensive. In passing to and fro some of them exchanged a smiling nod and a few a hurried word of greeting. But on the whole the Prime Minister was treated as a man of no importance. He did not seem to mind, but I think he realised the fact.

Although this caste feeling was an important constituent of the motive in the Lords party, it was by no means the whole of it ; among some thoughtful and prominent politicians there was deep feeling with regard to the probable effect of the measure, not only on particular groups in the community, but on national life as a whole. The British method of government had grown up bit by bit, had been tested section by section, and had been slowly consolidated, not so much in accordance with abstract logic as with racial instincts. Storm and stress had there been in building it together, but from the hundreds of years of struggle there had come about a system of government which in its combination of practicalness on the one hand, and its homage to heredity

and tradition on the other, was exactly suited to our national temperament and produced on the whole the best results in the world. The very inconsistencies in our Constitution were British. It was a strong, well-tried system, had been and still was a model for other States. Could it be argued, then, on any ground at all that the changes proposed by the Parliament Bill were advisable? Even if they could be justified by a pedantic plea for perfect fairness, surely the lessons of the past taught us that such changes would revolt the spirit of the country. We are not fond of revolutions in England; we have put ourselves on a summit among the nations by pushing along in recent centuries without revolution, or rather by the exercise of those qualities which have prevented us from promoting revolution. Suddenly to take away the powers of the House of Lords—however unjustly the Lords had behaved towards one political party—was surely to do something entirely out of harmony with the generic trait of the British race. These were thoughts at the back of a good deal of genuine opposition to the Government's measure. The men who felt thus earnestly and deeply could not be touched by any of the arguments of the New Liberals. That their fears must just as fittingly have arisen at the taking away of the personal power of the veto from the monarch had no effect on them. At the rock bottom of the controversy was the fact that the ideals of these sincere Conservatives were incompatible with the ideals of the New Liberals. There could be no accommodation; and there was nothing for it but to fight.

No

The House of Lords met on June 28th to begin their detailed alteration of the Bill. Lord Donoughmore, the

Chairman of committees, presided, and this left the Lord Chancellor free to take his place beside Lord Morley and Lord Haldane on the Government Front Bench, and to help in the hourly struggle against the Conservatives. They made up an interesting trio. Never did three statesmen have a busier time. For days they were kept fully occupied in rebutting attacks on the measure, refusing to accept proposals for its alteration, and declining to admit that the amendments put forward were in any way likely to improve the Government proposals. Sometimes all three found it necessary to speak on the same amendment in reply to the many speeches made on the other side, and now and again one or other would have to make two speeches in the course of a single discussion. They held the fort bravely. Their language was always moderate, their tone always courteous, but they were invariably uncompromising. They would accept nothing. In effect, they said, "You are trying to turn the Bill inside out by these extraordinary amendments, and we refuse to have anything to do with them." Indignation flared up on the other side, of course, at times, and "unreasonable," "obdurate" were adjectives which their attitude called forth. They were not resentful. The three men felt themselves to be the champions and spokesmen of the Commons, entrusted to meet face to face the powerful and pretentious force which for so long had rendered the efforts of one great party in the State of no avail. They brought reserves of culture and knowledge to their aid; recalled the lessons of history, pressed home the teachings of philosophy. Occasionally passages in their speeches met with tolerant smiles from some of the "back-woodsmen." At these times the gravely indulgent

demeanour of the three statesmen was a sight for the gods.

What then were the alterations which the Conservatives had set out to make in the Bill? They were many and various, but their general effect can soon be indicated. The Bill as it came up from the Commons may be divided into two parts. The first part dealt with money bills, which it was claimed the Lords had no right to interfere with at all, and it was laid down that if the Peers did not pass a money bill without amendment within a month after they received it the measure should be passed over their heads. The Speaker of the House of Commons was to decide what was and what was not a money bill. The second part of the measure dealt with general legislation as distinct from financial legislation. By it the power of the Lords to veto a bill absolutely was taken away. It was laid down that if a bill passed by the House of Commons in three successive sessions were rejected by the Lords in each of those sessions it might become law without their consent. The only proviso was that two years should have elapsed between the date of the second reading in the first of the sessions in the House of Commons and the date on which it passed the House of Commons in the third of those sessions. In a sentence, the Bill took away from the Lords any power of interference with a money bill, and with regard to other bills gave the opportunity to delay them for two years only. The "grave amendments" forecasted by Lord Midleton were very grave indeed. With regard to money bills it was proposed that the duty of deciding what was a financial measure should be taken from the Speaker and given to a committee (drawn not exclusively from the Commons)

of which the Speaker should be the chairman. This committee would have to decide whether the main governing purpose of a bill imposing taxation was purely financial or not. If it were not it could of course be held up for two years instead of having to be passed at once. A host of objections were put forward against the Speaker as arbiter. "He would be almost more than human," said Lord Cromer, "if he were not influenced by the political atmosphere with which he is surrounded, and if he were not unconsciously biassed by the desire to assert the privileges and extend the functions of the Commons." The Government trio were very firm about the matter, and the undeviating impartiality of the Speaker was emphasised. They pressed the point that the Speaker had always possessed the power of deciding what were the Commons' privileges. This proposed committee, it was shown, would possess unparalleled power. "The committee," said the Lord Chancellor, "is not an advising committee, but a deciding committee, and the Commons would be dethroned from its hitherto acknowledged supremacy in matters of finance." By 183 votes to 44 the House of Lords decided to take out the words "Speaker of the House of Commons," as the arbiter. The proposal of Lord Cromer that the committee should decide as to whether the governing purposes of a bill was purely financial was designed to prevent the Parliamentary sin known as "tacking," that is to say, the addition to a privileged financial measure of provisions which would come under the head of general legislation, and over which the Lords should have greater control. No doubt the Budget of 1909 was in mind. Lord Haldane answered the amendment quite frankly. "The Budget," he said

“is part of the political programme of the year, and to take out of it purposes which were political, and say that those purposes may not be the governing purposes in the Budget without bringing them under the definition of extraneous matters, is to make the task of the Chancellor of the Exchequer as impossible one.” The Conservative Peers treated the Government arguments as if they were mere excuses. The amendment was carried by 192 votes to 48.

What I have stated shows the fundamental change which the Peers had made in the first part of the Government scheme. The change in the second part was no less far-reaching. Lord Lansdowne put forward an amendment which was regarded as the crucial modification of the Bill from the Conservative standpoint (though I do not think its effects from the larger constitutional aspect was really greater than the transformation in the clause affecting finance). Lord Lansdowne proposed that the second part of the Bill taking away the absolute veto of the Lords with regard to general legislation should not apply to measures affecting the existence of the Crown or the Protestant Succession ; measures which established Home Rule ; or measures which in the opinion of the joint committee raised “an issue of great gravity upon which the judgment of the country has not been sufficiently ascertained.” In these cases the Bill was not to become law until it had been approved by the electors. This meant that a Home Rule bill might be thrown out by the Lords, or might be held up by them with a view to an appeal to the country. Lord Lansdowne suggested the appeal should be by Referendum. The sting of the amendment was in the latter part of it. The joint

undone
committee was to be empowered in effect to say when there should be an appeal to the country. I do not think it can seriously be contended that this did not alter the entire idea of the Government Bill. I give some of Lord Lansdowne's words in support of this proposal. "Under Clause 2 a majority of the House of Commons has only to insist for two years on any measure for that measure to become law, not only over the head of your Lordships' House, but over the head of the country. It is necessary to bear in mind that the majority which may bring this about may be a wholly insignificant majority in point of numbers. It may be a majority having no relation whatever to the number of votes by which it is supported in the country; it may be a precarious and dwindling majority—a majority in the House of Commons no longer in what the Prime Minister describes as 'the plentitude of its powers.' It may be an assorted majority not representing some great concentrated body of public feeling, but a majority representing as it were a patchwork, or it may be a majority returned not on one issue but on half a dozen issues; and the majority so composed may have been secured by those methods of controlling discussion in the House of Commons with which we are to become more and more familiar with every year that passes. From such a majority under this Bill nothing whatever is safe. The most fundamental questions are at its mercy; it may insist on the passage of measures inflicting irreparable injury on our most cherished institutions. The Crown is not safe; the Constitution is not safe; the Church is not safe; our political liberties are not safe, and literally there is no institution however much revered and respected in this country which is

beyond the reach of a majority described as I described it just now. Finally, this Bill for which you claim to have a definite mandate may be fundamentally altered. It is revolutionary now, but it may be made even more evolutionary if it suits you to do so."

This is what Lord Morley said about the proposal to institute the all-supreme deciding committee. "Personally I am indifferent as to how this committee is to be formed. However composed, let us see what it is to do. It is to decide without appeal, as I understand, first whether the general bill raises an issue of great gravity; secondly whether they think that the judgment of the country on this bill has been sufficiently ascertained; and thirdly whether it is in their view an occasion for a Referendum. They oust, and this is not a bit of exaggeration, the responsible Ministers of the Crown; they over-ride and supersede the House of Commons; they are clothed with a power which your Lordships have long ago ceased to maintain in its panoply—namely, the power of compelling an alteration which is in effect tantamount in its essential features and practical effect—I mean the Referendum—to a dissolution. Does any noble Lord say he is in favour of giving this House the right of compelling a dissolution? You no doubt did it eighteen months ago, but here it is suggested that it does not matter what the House of Commons think, no matter what the Ministers think, this committee is to decide upon any question which is referred to them, and their decision shall be final and conclusive for all purposes."

Of course any amendment which was taken to a division meant the defeat of the Government; and Lord Lansdowne's amendment was carried by 253 votes to 46.

The Government trio had a few Ministers not of very great weight on each side of them, and behind them two or three stalwarts like Lord Sheffield and Lord St. Davids. Speaking generally, however, the unofficial Liberal Peers were a melancholy disappointment to the party. In an earlier part of this work I have estimated the total number of nominal Liberal Peers in the House of Lords as 100 ; but this was an outside figure, for no absolutely definite record exists of the political opinion of a good many members, and always there is going on a drift from the Liberal side of the House to the Conservative side. Rich men or minor Ministers are elevated to the House of Lords not so much on account of ability or the soundness of their Radicalism as because of their services to the party in indirect ways which it is not necessary here to elaborate. Some of them are good men and true, and their Liberal opinions last out their lives, but their successors succeed to place and riches without succeeding to the political beliefs of their fathers. Then there are those of lesser calibre, who after joining the House of Lords are gradually permeated with a sense of the inherent virtues, to say nothing of the dignity, of the Upper Chamber. They begin to realise that perhaps there is something a little presumptuous in the clamour, the discontent, and the disrespect of Radicals in the Lower Chamber. Almost unconsciously they are impregnated with the caste sense of the caste privileged. When this comes about it is only a matter of time before they find themselves sitting on the Conservative benches. It is difficult to keep track of Peers when their impulses are undergoing transmogrification. Though I have said that there were 100 Liberals in the House, it is possible that not more than 80 of

them would have been unashamed to proclaim themselves Liberals during the period of the Parliament Bill. And there were weak-kneed among these eighty. The strength of Liberal convictions among the Liberal Peers may be judged from the fact that in the vital divisions I have given, not fifty could be found to support Lord Morley.

Below I give the Parliament Bill as amended in the committee and report stages in the House of Lords. The alterations and additions made by the Peers are in italics.

A BILL

INTITULED

AN Act to make provision with respect to the powers of the House of Lords in relation to those of the House of Commons, and to limit the duration of Parliament.

WHEREAS it is expedient that provision should be made for regulating the relations between the two Houses of Parliament—

AND whereas it is intended to substitute for the House of Lords as it at present exists a Second Chamber constituted on a popular instead of hereditary basis, but such substitution cannot be immediately brought into operation—

AND whereas provision will require hereafter to be made by Parliament in a measure effecting such substitution for limiting and defining the powers of the new Second Chamber, but it is expedient to make such provision as in this Act appears for restricting the existing powers of the House of Lords—

BE it therefore enacted by the King's most Excellent Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, and

Commons, in this present Parliament assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows—

1. (1) If a Money Bill, having been passed by the House of Commons, and sent up to the House of Lords at least one month before the end of the session, is not passed by the House of Lords without amendment within one month after it is so sent up to that House, the Bill shall, unless the House of Commons direct to the contrary, be presented to His Majesty, and become an Act of Parliament on the Royal Assent being signified, notwithstanding that the House of Lords have not consented to the Bill.

(2) A Money Bill means a public Bill which in the opinion of the *Joint Committee* contains only provisions dealing with all or any of the following subjects, namely, the imposition, repeal, remission, alteration, or regulation of taxation; the imposition for the payment of debt or other financial purposes of charges on the Consolidated Fund, or on money provided by Parliament, or the variation or repeal of any such charges; supply; the appropriation, receipt, custody, issue, or audit of accounts of public money; the raising or guarantee of any loan or the repayment thereof; or subordinate matters incidental to the provisions of such Bill; but if, in the opinion of the *Joint Committee*, the main governing purpose of a Bill imposing taxation, or of any portion of a Bill imposing taxation, is not purely financial in character, the Bill, or such portion thereof as aforesaid, shall be subject to the provisions of section two of this Act. In this subsection the expressions “taxation,” “public money,” and “loan,” respectively, do not include any taxation, money, or loan raised by local authorities or bodies for local purposes.

(3) THERE shall be endorsed on every Money Bill when it is sent up to the House of Lords, and when it is presented to His Majesty for assent, the certificate

of the Speaker of the House of Commons signed by him that it is a Money Bill.

2. (1) If any Public Bill other than a Money Bill or a Bill containing any provisions to extend the maximum duration of Parliament beyond five years is passed by the House of Commons in three successive sessions (whether of the same Parliament or not), and, having been sent up to the House of Lords at least one month before the end of the session, is rejected by the House of Lords in each of those sessions, that Bill shall, on its rejection for the third time by the House of Lords, unless the House of Commons direct to the contrary, be presented to His Majesty and become an Act of Parliament on the Royal Assent being signified thereto, notwithstanding that the House of Lords have not consented to the Bill: Provided that this provision shall not take effect unless two years have elapsed between the date of the second reading in the first of those sessions of the Bill in the House of Commons, and the date on which it passes the House of Commons in the third of those sessions: *Provided further that any Bill—*

- (a) *which affects the existence of the Crown or the Protestant Succession thereto; or*
- (b) *which establishes a National Parliament or Assembly or a National Council in Ireland, Scotland, Wales, or England, with legislative powers therein; or*
- (c) *which has been referred to the Joint Committee; and which in their opinion raises an issue of great gravity upon which the judgment of the country has not been sufficiently ascertained*

shall not be presented to His Majesty nor receive the Royal Assent under the provisions of this section unless and until it has been submitted to and approved by the electors in manner to be hereafter provided by Act of Parliament.

(2) *Any question whether a Bill comes within the*

meaning of paragraphs (a) (b) of sub-section (1) of this section shall be decided by the Joint Committee.

(3) WHEN a Bill is presented to His Majesty for assent in pursuance of the provisions of this section, there shall be endorsed on the Bill the certificate of the Speaker of the House of Commons signed by him that the provisions of this section have been duly complied with.

(4) A Bill shall be deemed to be rejected by the House of Lords if it is not passed by the House of Lords either without amendment or with such amendments only as may be agreed to by both Houses.

(5) A Bill shall be deemed to be the same Bill as a former Bill sent up to the House of Lords in the preceding session if, when it is sent up to the House of Lords, it is identical with the former Bill or contains only such alterations as are certified by the Speaker of the House of Commons to be necessary owing to the time which has elapsed since the date of the former Bill, or to represent any amendments which have been made by the House of Lords in the former Bill in the preceding session, and any amendments which are certified by the Speaker to have been made by the House of Lords in the third session and agreed to by the House of Commons shall be inserted in the Bill as presented for Royal Assent in pursuance of this section—

PROVIDED that the House of Commons may, if they think fit, on the passage of such a Bill through the House in the second or third session, suggest any further amendments without inserting the amendments in the Bill, and any such suggested amendments shall be considered by the House of Lords, and if agreed to by that House, shall be treated as amendments made by the House of Lords and agreed to by the House of Commons; but the exercise of this power by the House of Commons shall not affect the

operation of this section in the event of the Bill being rejected by the House of Lords.

3. (1) *At the beginning of each Parliament a Joint Committee (in this Act referred to as "the Joint Committee") shall be appointed, consisting of the Lord Chancellor, the Speaker of the House of Commons, the Chairman of Ways and Means of the House of Commons, a Lord of Appeal to be chosen by and from the Lords of Appeal in Ordinary, and other Peers of Parliament holding, or who have held high judicial office, and a Member of the House of Commons to be appointed by the Speaker, for the purposes of this Act. The Speaker of the House of Commons shall be chairman, and he shall have a casting vote.*

(2) *The Speaker of the House of Commons may, if he think fit, and shall, if so requested in writing by a Minister of the Crown or upon a resolution of either House of Parliament in that behalf, call together the Joint Committee for the purpose of deciding any question which under the provisions of this Act may be decided by them.*

(3) *The decision of the Joint Committee on any question so referred to them shall be final and conclusive for all purposes, and shall not be questioned in any court of law.*

4. (1) *In every Bill presented to His Majesty, under the preceding provisions of this Act, the words of enactment shall be as follows, that is to say—*

"Be it enacted by the King's most Excellent Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Commons in this present Parliament assembled, in accordance with the provisions of the Parliament Act, 1911, and by authority of the same, as follows."

(2) *Any alteration of a Bill necessary to give effect to this section shall not be deemed to be an amendment of the Bill.*

5. *ANY certificate of the Speaker of the House of Commons given under this Act shall be conclusive*

for all purposes, and shall not be questioned in any court of law.

6. NOTHING in this Act shall diminish or qualify the existing rights and privileges of the House of Commons.

7. FIVE years shall be substituted for seven years as the time fixed for the maximum duration of Parliament under the Septennial Act, 1715.

8. THIS Act may be cited as the Parliament Act, 1911.

CHAPTER XVII

THE STALWARTS AT BAY

EVEN in its altered form the Bill was in the eyes of many Conservative Peers a hateful and dangerous one, and the group was headed by the venerable and vigorous ex-Lord Chancellor, Lord Halsbury. Before July 20th, the date of the third reading, some of the more eager began to express themselves with force as to what should be done when the Bill came back from the Commons denuded of its alterations, and more than one well-known newspaper threw reserve to the winds and demanded that there should be no acceptance of the Parliament Bill in its original form, and that the Government should be dared to create its new Peers. Guesses were afloat as to the action of Lord Lansdowne. He was plainly told by a good many of those who usually supported him that they would never consent to a policy of surrender, and that they intended to go down fighting. The "no surrender" section soon made it clear that they did not mean to do anything sensational on the occasion of the third reading, but that they intended to reserve their energies for the time when the Bill came back from the Commons. The situation stiffened, Lord Halsbury's supporters began to assert their determination with assurance, almost with

recklessness. "Let us sacrifice anything but principle," they said; "we will defy the Government to do its worst." Every one recognised now that Mr. Asquith had the power to ask the King to create Peers, and that the Peers would be created if the Government thought it necessary. Only the most bitter partisans failed to recognise that the Parliament Bill had been before the electors and had been endorsed by them; and in the midst of all the heat of excitement it was admitted that the country if consulted would return a similar verdict to that of the December previous. There could, therefore, be no question of the King changing his advisers with a view to asking again the opinion of the country. The Conservatives were thus face to face with painful alternatives, and there was much seriousness in the situation when the Halsbury movement began to develop. The argument of the "no surrender" party was that to allow the Bill to pass after all the declamations against it would humiliate the party throughout the country; Conservatives would feel that all the sound and fury of the past month meant nothing, that the Government had only to use threats of sufficient harshness and the Conservative leaders would at once throw up their hands. The suggestion that the Peers would suffer in social prestige by the extension of their order, met with a torrent of scorn. Wild spirits (a good many of them outside the Peerage) declared that the Lords would lose respect for ever if they allowed a selfish consideration of this kind to weigh with them.

No surrender

This was the position of things when the third reading was reached on July 20th. The debate which occupied only half an evening was notable for two points, one the

veiled announcement of surrender by Lord Lansdowne, the other the impassioned declaration of no surrender by Lord Halsbury. The latter who rose from the side of his leader sounded a call to arms. It was a wonderful speech from a man eighty-six years of age. Lord Lansdowne's delivery came first. "Some at all events of the amendments which we have introduced into the Bill are so essential that we should certainly not be prepared to recede from them—so long as we remain free agents." The pause in the middle of the sentence, the emphasis on the last few words, conveyed the impression to listeners that the Conservative chiefs would only give in when Mr. Asquith definitely stated that he intended to create Peers to overcome resistance. A few minutes later Lord Halsbury stood at the Table in the place of Lord Lansdowne. A short, thick old man, with massive head square-set on heavy shoulders, there was not a trace of the enfeeblement of age about him. His voice rang out clear and strong like that of a man in his prime, and his intensity and passionate feeling was such as might be expected in a man on the threshold of life. Instead of that he was one who had been in political life for sixty years. I think opponents as well as friends were rather proud of Lord Halsbury on that night. The old statesman raised his fist in the air, "In voting against such a measure I shall be doing what I regard as a duty to God and my country."

With mixed feelings and mixed intentions the House of Lords passed the third reading. After this came ten days of waiting, a period filled with adjurations and rousing defiances on the part of the Conservatives, and silent preparation on the side of the Government. The altered

Bill was to be considered by the Commons on Monday, July 24th. Before that day arrived the "no surrender" movement had become a matter of magnitude; not only had many of the back-bench Peers hurried to the standard of Lord Halsbury, but he had been joined by prominent politicians like Lord Selborne and Lord Salisbury, and also by responsible members of the party in the Commons including Mr. Austen Chamberlain, Mr. George Wyndham, Lord Hugh Cecil and Mr. F. E. Smith. The position for Mr. Balfour and Lord Lansdowne was, of course, not a pleasant one, but it should be stated that a large number of the quieter and not less influential Conservatives stood by the two leaders. Unjust and disastrous as the Parliament Bill might be, it was now certain, they contended, that it would be passed in one way or another, either by the consent of the House of Lords as then constituted, or with the assent of the House of Lords enlarged by the addition of new Liberal Peers. Apart from the lamentable disturbance of the Constitution which a wholesale creation of Peers would cause, was it not expedient, they asked, to pass the Parliament Bill, if passed it must be, without the addition of Liberal Peers rather than with their addition? Flood the House with these Radicals, and the Government would have no difficulty in putting through at once Home Rule, Welsh Disestablishment and other great legislative changes without even having to suffer the two years' delay possible under the Parliament Bill. "Mere cowardice," retorted the stalwarts. "To give in now after all that has occurred would show that the Lords' protestations have been all sham, would hold them up not merely to humiliating comment, but to well-deserved ridicule. Such a course of action would

undoubtedly disrupt the party. What is wanted is a strong line. Let the new Radical Peers be sent up. The violence of the Government's action will disgust the country. Moreover, the new Peers under the civilising influence of the House of Lords will soon begin to lose enthusiasm for Radical projects, and before long there will be abstinence and presently conversion."

Heat and excitement grew in the Conservative camp until Friday, July 21st, was reached. That was a notable day in the history of the constitutional conflict. In the morning the Cabinet held a meeting, and at the same time the Conservative leaders assembled at Mr. Balfour's house in Carlton Gardens. The latter body had indeed matter of importance to discuss, for Mr. Balfour put before the gathering the following letter he had received from Mr. Asquith.

"10, Downing Street,
"July 20th, 1911.

"DEAR MR. BALFOUR,

"I think it is courteous and right before any public decisions are announced to let you know how we regard the political situation. When the Parliament Bill in the form which it has now assumed returns to the House of Commons we shall be compelled to ask that House to disagree with the Lords' amendments. In the circumstances, should the necessity arise the Government will advise the King to exercise his prerogative to secure the passing into law of the Bill in substantially the same form in which it left the House of Commons, and His Majesty has been pleased to signify that he will consider it his duty to accept and act on that advice.

"Yours sincerely,
"H. H. ASQUITH."

Mr. Balfour's small private meeting of leaders was

followed in the afternoon by a general gathering of Conservative Peers at Lansdowne House. Between 150 and 200 members of the House of Lords were present. Lord Lansdowne announced that Mr. Asquith had sent him a copy of the letter addressed to Mr. Balfour, and read the contents to the assembled company. The proceedings that followed were very animated. No official report was forthcoming, but the *Times* in an interesting account gave the following details:—

“Lord Lansdowne, in addressing the meeting, it is understood laid both sides of the case before them; pointing out that it was now clear that the Parliament Bill was going to be passed, and that the alternatives therefore were whether it should be passed with the aid of Liberal Peers, freshly created, or whether it should be allowed to pass without the Government's resort to a special creation. It was pointed out that the desire of the Opposition had naturally first been to prevent the passage of the Parliament Bill, and secondly, if it were found that for the present such legislation could not be stayed, to prevent the passage of some other measures, such as Irish Home Rule, which might be passed under its operation. If the special creation of Peers would stay the passage of either one or the other the position would be different from what it was. But if Peers were created neither the passage of the Parliament Bill nor of measures such as Home Rule would be prevented, while, at the same time, the King's prerogative would have been brought into the political arena, and a step taken which must be deplored. Considerations such as these were, it is believed, urged by Lord Lansdowne, who left the meeting in no doubt that in his opinion the Opposition were no longer ‘free agents,’ but must yield to force majeure.

“The discussion that ensued was not confined to the

main theme, for it is understood that a further intimation from the Prime Minister to the Opposition leaders was brought before the meeting; to the effect that the Government would not release the Parliament Bill from the House of Commons unless the Opposition leaders in the House of Lords gave an assurance that it would go through. This, it is stated, provoked the meeting. The difficulties which any Opposition leaders in the House of Lords would labour under in the attempt to secure such an assurance are obvious. It is doubtful whether Lord Lansdowne will ever be in a position to account for the action which all the Opposition Peers would take in the House of Lords.

“The meeting was at times of a stormy character; and there was a vigorous opposition to the views put forward by Lord Lansdowne. Lord Halsbury has publicly taken the side of “no surrender” under any circumstances, it is an open secret that Lord Selborne sympathises with this view, and it is understood Lord Salisbury lent them his support. These three Front Bench leaders were cheered to the echo by the Peers who share their views, and impassioned speeches were also made by rank-and-file Peers against the proposal to yield to force majeure, speeches it is stated which were not uncoloured by invective. There is reason to believe, however, that those who took this view were in the minority—some estimate their number at about fifty. Their number may have been more, but it was clear that Lord Lansdowne’s supporters were in the majority. The fact that there was a strong and determined minority renders it impossible yet to say what will be the issue. The meeting was inconclusive, and no resolution of any kind was put.”

Unmistakably passion was in evidence at the meeting; it was a sign of the feelings which were to find expression outside as soon as Mr. Asquith’s letter was made public. There was an amazing outburst from the Conservatives,

newspaper and individual politicians joining in a shriek of rage and using epithets in regard to Mr. Asquith which might have made even that hardened statesman flinch. I use the word "amazing" advisedly. From the time the Prime Minister in April, 1910, announced in effect that he meant to secure the power to make the coming Liberal decision of the country operative there was no reasonable doubt that he had in mind the promise of the royal prerogative for the creation of Peers. The election came and the Liberals were successful. Thence onward controversy was based on the supposition that the creation of Peers would be resorted to by the Government if it should prove necessary. Fiercely denounced by the Conservatives, the prospective action of Mr. Asquith was, nevertheless, recognised as a certain feature of the future. At intervals in the discussion some of the Conservatives expressed the conjecture that the "guarantees" which Mr. Asquith had obtained were limited in their extent, and would confine his action when the crisis came, and from one or two quarters now and again there came the pious and earnest declaration that Mr. Asquith had no "guarantees" at all. Generally, however, there was acceptance of the statement that the Prime Minister had an understanding with the King, and that if the Lords did not pass the Parliament Bill Mr. Asquith would force it through with the help of new Liberal Peers.

"Puppet Peers" they were derisively called by Conservative journalists, and they were ridiculed in advance by witty and active-minded Conservatives on various occasions. Politicians of a more serious bent endeavoured to show that Mr. Asquith's prospective action was unprecedented and unconstitutional.

Opponents as well as supporters recalled the occasions when the royal prerogative had been brought into use for the purpose of increasing the membership of the House of Lords. It is advisable perhaps to throw a passing glance over a wider field than was occupied by the individual cases. The House of Lords, always a very exclusive body, used to be comparatively small, and no more than 29 temporal Peers received writs of summons to the first Parliament of Henry VII. Under the Stuarts the number went up to about 150. Further additions were made as time went on, and the Lords consistently regarded the increase of their numbers with a good deal of disfavour, for they saw quite clearly that their personal dignity and power became less as the size of their assembly grew. By the time George III. came to the Throne there were 174 Peers. From this time onward new Peers were showered upon the Upper House, and it is recorded by Sir Erskine May in his "Constitutional History" that by 1801 Mr. Pitt had created or promoted during the seventeen years of his administration upwards of 140 Peers sitting by hereditary right. It must not be forgotten that in times gone by as in more recent periods the new creations of Peers recommended by any Government have been always predominantly on their own side in politics, and thus have tended to add to the strength of the Government in power. It is true that men of lustrous intellect and of famous achievements have been regularly found in the lists of those given seats in the House of Lords, but it cannot be denied that the general trend of Ministers is to give hereditary and legislative rank to those of their own party. So that, violent as may seem the expedient of creating all at once a large

number of Peers for the carrying out of a political object, it is really no more than the concentration of a method used with some diffuseness for at least two centuries.

The main precedents, two in number, for the creation or the threatened creation of a considerable number of Peers at one time were some distance back in history, and each was separated from the other by a wide stretch of years. The cases varied greatly, but both, however, were quoted for their own purposes by the contending parties. The first instance was connected with the politics of 1711-1712. Queen Anne on the advice of Robert Harley, the Tory Lord High Treasurer of the day, made twelve new Peers in order to override the inconvenient Whig majority in the House of Lords. In taking this event into account for the purpose of comparison it is necessary to remember the political atmosphere of England at that time, and the particular stage of constitutional development which had been reached as well as the actual facts of the moment. England was on the verge of the period when the management of the nation was to be given over entirely to party government, under which the opinion of the mass of the population was to be of increasing importance as the years went on. Queen Anne, a weak and opinionated woman, was already buffeted between the intrigues of the two sections of her counsellors, Whig and Tory, but she possessed a good deal of individual power, and took a prominent and personal part in the conduct of national affairs. The strength of the monarch's personal word is sufficiently revealed by the statement that great men of the State, notably Harley on the one side, and the Duke of Marlborough on

the other, sought to establish favour and to gain power; among other means, by women's influence at court.

The Duke of Marlborough, winning great victories on the continent against the French, relied on the support of the Whigs who were backing up the war. Queen Anne's sympathies were with the Tories, and the Tories were the peace party of the time. The country was with them, it is related, though of course the opinion "of the country" then had nothing like so wide an application as in later times. Intrigues went on apace while Marlborough was fighting his country's battles abroad. Allured by hopes of conciliation with the Tories, he was treacherously deceived by St. John, a Tory Minister. The position is clearly described by J. R. Green. "He returned to England, and his efforts induced the House of Lords to denounce the contemplated peace; but the support of the Commons, and the Queen and the general hatred of the war among the people enabled Harley to ride down all resistance. At the opening of 1712 the Whig majority in the House of Lords was swamped by the creation of twelve Tory Peers. Marlborough was dismissed from his command, charged with peculation and condemned as guilty by a vote of the House of Commons. The duke at once withdrew from England, and with his withdrawal all opposition to the peace was at an end. Marlborough's flight was followed by the conclusion of a treaty at Utrecht between France, England, and the Dutch."

Smollett in relating current happenings has the following passage: "The commissioners for examining the public accounts having discovered that the Duke of Marlborough had received an annual present of five or six thousand pounds from the contractors of bread to

the army, the Queen declared in council that she thought fit to dismiss him from all his employments that the matter might be impartially examined. This declaration was imparted to him in a letter under her own hand in which she took occasion to complain of the treatment she had received. She probably alluded to the insolence of his duchess ; the subjection in which she had been kept by the late Ministry ; and the pains lately taken by the Whigs to depreciate her conduct and thwart her measures with respect to the peace. The duke wrote an answer to Her Majesty vindicating himself from the charge which had been brought against his character ; and his two daughters, the Countess of Sunderland and the Lady Rialton, resigned their places of ladies in the bedchamber. The Ministry in order to ascertain a majority in the House of Lords persuaded the Queen to take a measure which nothing but necessity could justify. She created twelve Peers at once, and on the second of January they were introduced into the Upper House without opposition. The Lord Keeper delivered to the House a message from the Queen desiring they would adjourn to the fourteenth day of the month. The anti-courtiers alleged that the Queen could not send a message to any one House to adjourn, but ought to have directed it to both Houses. The objection produced a debate which was terminated in favour of the Court by the weight of the twelve new Peers." Smollett adds that " On the first day of their being introduced, when the question was put about adjourning the Earl of Wharton asked one of them ' whether they voted by their foreman.' "

This is what Swift the friend of Harley wrote about the matter : " It was, I conceive, upon these motives that

the Treasurer advised Her Majesty to create twelve new Lords, and thereby disable the sting of faction for the rest of her lifetime ; this promotion was so ordered that a third part were of those on whom or their posterity the Peerage would naturally devolve ; and the rest were such whose merit, birth and fortune could admit of no exception. The adverse party being thus driven down by open force had nothing left but to complain, which they loudly did ; that it was a pernicious example set for ill princes to follow, who by the same rule might make at any time an hundred as well as twelve, and by these means become masters of the House of Lords whenever they pleased, which would be dangerous to our liberties. To this it was answered that ill princes seldom troubled themselves to look for precedents ; that men of great estates will not be less fond of preserving their liberties when they are created peers ; that in such a government as this where the prince holds the balance between two great powers, the nobility and the people, it is the very nature of his office to remove from one scale into the other, or sometimes put his own weight in the lightest so as to bring both to an equilibrium ; and lastly that the other party had been above twenty years corrupting the nobility with republican principles which nothing but the royal prerogative could hinder from overspreading us."

Time brought its revenge for the Whigs. In 1715, when the Tories were a broken party, Harley, then the Earl of Oxford, was the object of articles of impeachment. "The impeachment does not seem to have been very substantial in its character," writes Mr. Justin McCarthy in his "History of the Four Georges." "The great

majority of its articles referred to the conduct of Oxford with regard to the Treaty of Utrecht. One article accused him of having abused his influence over Her Majesty by prevailing upon her to exercise 'in the most unprecedented and dangerous manner' her prerogative by the creation of twelve Peers in December, 1711. A motion that Oxford be committed to the Tower was made, and on this motion he spoke a few words which were at once ingenuous and dignified. He asserted his innocence of any treasonable practice or thought, and declared that what he had done was done in obedience to the positive orders of the Queen, and he asked the House what might not happen if Ministers of State acting on the immediate commands of their sovereign were afterwards to be made accountable for their proceedings. . . . To impeach a statesman simply because he had taken a political course which was afterwards disapproved of by the nation, and which was discredited by results, was simply to say that any failure in the policy of a Minister of the Crown might make him liable to impeachment when his enemies came into power. . . . It is curious in our eyes to find Oxford defending his conduct on the ground that he had simply obeyed the positive orders of his sovereign. A Minister would run more risk of impeachment in our days who declared that he had acted in some great public crisis simply in obedience to his sovereign's orders than if he were to stand accountable for the greatest errors, the grossest blunders committed on the judgment and on the responsibility of himself and his colleagues." The Earl of Oxford went to the Tower; but after two years' imprisonment was acquitted by the peers and released.

Harley's creation of peers with its sequel was pressed

into service by the Conservatives, but the Liberals relied on another historical incident 120 years later. In 1832 the Whig Ministry of the time secured the passage of the Reform Bill through a hostile House of Lords by means of a promise from William IV., to create Peers for that purpose if the Upper House continued obstinate. To have a proper understanding of the Ministerial action, a glance at preceding events is necessary. For more than a generation the country had been gradually awaking to the anomalies which marked the representative system of the time. Courageous individual statesmen had from period to period raised their voices loud in protest, and presently there began to grow up throughout the country a realisation not merely of injustice in the prevalent state of things, but also of the inherent stupidity of it all. Practically uninhabited hamlets retained their privilege of sending members to Parliament, while great growing towns had no representative at all. It was stated in 1793 that in England and Wales 70 Members were returned by 35 places in which there was scarcely any electorate; that 90 members were returned by 46 places with less than 50 electors; and 37 members by 19 places having no more than 100 electors. "Such places," says Sir Erskine May, "were returning members while Leeds, Birmingham, and Manchester were unrepresented; and their pretended representatives were the nominees of Peers and other wealthy patrons, and voted at their bidding." He quotes Mr. Lambton as stating in 1821 that he was prepared to prove by evidence at the Bar of the House of Commons that 180 individuals returned by nomination or otherwise 350 Members. Open bribery and corruption

was practically a recognised thing at every election ; and the expense of contests was enormous. The then representative system appears to us now as something which was at once ludicrous and painful. Yet it found defenders.

For many years the reformers worked arduously, and they took with them an increasing volume of opinion. In 1830, when Lord Grey became the head of the Ministry, he announced that the Government "would take into immediate consideration the state of the representation with a view to the correction of those defects which had been occasioned in it by the operation of time ; and with a view of a re-establishment of that confidence on the part of the people which he was afraid Parliament did not at present enjoy to the full extent that is essential for the safety and welfare of the country, and the preservation of Government." The Ministry had thus engaged themselves to reform. The people came forward eagerly in support. Sir Erskine May, writing of the circumstances of the time, says : "So great were the difficulties with which the Government had to contend that they needed all the encouragement the people could give ; they had to encounter the reluctance of the King, the interests of the proprietors of boroughs which Mr. Pitt, unable to overcome, had sought to purchase, the opposition of two-thirds of the House of Lords, and perhaps a majority of the House of Commons, and above all the strong Tory spirit of the country."

On March 1, 1831, Lord John Russell introduced the Reform Bill into the House of Commons. The measure was a bold one. It disfranchised 60 of the smallest boroughs, abolished nomination by individuals or corporations, and established a £10 household franchise in boroughs. The

Bill enfranchised about half a million people. Opponents of reform were angered by the measure, which while it did not entirely satisfy the extremists was well received by the people as a whole. On March 22nd, the second reading was carried by a majority of one in a House of 608 members. The crisis arrived a few weeks later. On going into Committee the Government were defeated by a majority of 8, on a motion against the reduction of the number of members, and the Government, feeling that the lesson of the amendment was that the Tories would, whenever they wished, take the conduct of the Bill out of the hands of Ministers, determined to appeal to the country. As a result a large majority of the House of Commons came back pledged to the Reform Bill. The second reading of the resuscitated measure was passed on July 6th by a majority of 136. Eventually the Bill went up to the Lords. The Lords rejected it by a majority of 41. Thereupon the House of Commons supported Ministers by a vote of confidence, and Parliament was prorogued. Disturbances throughout the country showed plainly the passion which had been aroused by the opposition of the Lords, showed plainly that the common people were determined on the bill. Known opponents of the measure were hissed and hooted as they drove through the London streets, and they had to be protected from violence by the police. Rioting took place in many parts of the provinces. Derby was the scene of disturbances which lasted for days ; Nottingham Castle was attacked by the mob and burned ; and in Bristol there was wrecking of houses and battles between the military and the people. In a sentence the country was on the verge of revolution.

Parliament met again on December 6th; and the third Reform Bill, unchanged in essentials, was brought in and was read a second time on the morning of Sunday, 18th December, by a majority of 162. The Peers this time did not venture to throw out the Bill entire, and the second reading was passed by a majority of 9, but directly the time came for the Bill to go into committee the Government found that there would be deadly indirect hostility. Lord Lyndhurst moved an amendment which though opposed by Ministers was carried by a majority of 35. A desperate course was now the only one for the Government; for it was apparent that nothing but compulsion would cause the Tory Lords to bend their will to that of the community at large. The Cabinet advised the King to consent to the creation of a sufficient number of Peers to carry the Bill. William refused to do so, and the Ministry resigned. The King thereupon sent for the Duke of Wellington and Sir Robert Peel and consulted with them about an alternative Government—while the country was raging in its demands for the measure so contemptuously treated by the governing classes. Eventually the King was compelled to recall Lord Grey. Mr. Justin McCarthy thus describes the scene when William gave his consent to the creation of Peers: “The consent was given at an interview that the King had with Lord Grey and Lord Brougham, Lord Brougham as Keeper of the Royal Conscience, taking the principal conduct of the negotiations on behalf of the Government. The King as usual on such occasions was flurried, awkward and hot-tempered, and when he had made up his mind to yield to the advice of his Ministers he could not so far master his temper as to make his

decision seem a graceful concession. Even when he announced that the concession was to be made, the trouble was not yet over. Lord Brougham thought it necessary to ask the King for his consent in writing to the new Peers, and hereupon the wrath of the sovereign blazed forth afresh. The King seemed to think that such a demand showed a want of confidence in him, which amounted to something like an insult, and he fretted and stormed for a while as though he had been like Petruchio, 'aboard carousing to his mates.' After a while, however, he came into a better humour, and perhaps saw the reasonableness of the plea that Lord Grey and Lord Brougham could not undertake the task now confided to them without the written warrant of the King's authority. William therefore turned away and scratched off a brief declaration conferring on his Ministers the power to create the necessary number of Peers, qualifying it merely with the condition that the sons of living Peers were to be called upon in the first instance." Strong words were used by the indignant Lords, but in view of the powers given to Lord Grey, they threw up further opposition, and the Reform Bill passed its third reading on June 4th, 1832, and received the royal assent on June 7th.

I have summarised the circumstances of the two precedents, and it will be seen that whereas Court intrigue had a good deal to do with what happened in 1711 and 1712, the occurrences of 1831 and 1832 were coincident with the rising of practically the whole of the people on the matter at issue. 12 was the number of Peers created by Queen Anne; a list of 80 was in the hands of Lord Brougham in 1832 (though it was estimated that the actual number of new Peers would be from 50

to 60) ; and in 1911 Mr. Asquith had to provide for the contingency of making something like 500 additions to the Upper House.

It may be noted that the House of Lords passed the second reading of the Reform Bill as they did the second reading of the Parliament Bill, and that it was on their subsequent action that the quarrel arose between them and the Government of the day in each case. The Conservatives of 1911 argued that the great difference in the two cases was to be found in the fact that whereas the country was on the verge of revolution in its fierce desire for the passage into law of the Reform Bill, the country in 1911 was very little concerned whether the Parliament Bill passed or not, and that a little less than half of the electors were strongly opposed to the measure. The reply of Ministers to this was that at the first election of 1910 the electors had endorsed the general intention of the Government to restrict the power of the Lords, and that at the second election of 1910 the electors having had before them a full parliamentary debate on the definite proposals of the Parliament Bill had signified their approval of that Bill by a majority of over 120.

The use of the King's prerogative apart from its value as an expedient of statesmanship was essential to Mr. Asquith from party considerations also, for his failure to take the course of forcing through the Parliament Bill by the creation of Peers if necessary would have been fatal to the Government. In the face of his words of April 1910, in face of the clear understanding on which the political battle had proceeded right along from that time, any hesitation would not only have led to his downfall, but to the immediate break-up of the Cabinet. Ministers

would have been hurled from office by their own infuriated followers. On the whole, therefore, the charge of treacherously concealing the possession of the "guarantees" and of springing them unfairly on the Opposition at the last moment may be dismissed as the outburst of defeated politicians who had not yet had time to get back their composure.

Though all the Conservatives at the first flush united in this blazing condemnation of the Prime Minister, they rapidly formed themselves into two sections, the first led by Mr. Balfour and Lord Lansdowne, urging that in view of the new situation the Parliament Bill should not be further opposed, and the second led by Lord Halsbury, Lord Selborne, and Mr. Austen Chamberlain, declaring that "no surrender" must be the policy of the party, and that the Government should be compelled to create its new Peers. It certainly seemed as if logical consistency rested with the "no surrender" group, for while in common with the whole body of Conservatives they had faced the prospect of the creation of Peers, they and they alone were now prepared to make good their defiances.

It was arranged that Mr. Balfour should address a meeting in the City of London on the following Tuesday, and the stalwarts of the other section organised a dinner on the Wednesday in honour of Lord Halsbury. Meanwhile, however, events marched rapidly. On Saturday, the day following the publication of the Asquith letter, the Prime Minister went to Buckingham Palace and saw the King, and it is to be presumed that he laid before him the lines of the speech which he proposed to make in the House of Commons on the Monday, when the amended Parliament Bill was to be taken into

consideration. There were frequent consultations among leaders on both sides during that Saturday. For the Conservatives, the week-end was one of feverish activity.

The split between the two sections was extending ; and the dinner to Lord Halsbury began to take the form of a manifesto to the country. It was announced that Mr. Austen Chamberlain was to be present as well as Lord Selborne, Mr. George Wyndham, Sir Edward Carson, Lord Salisbury, and Mr. F. E. Smith. All these and many other members of Parliament were, it appeared, committed to the policy of voting against the Parliament Bill when it came back from the Commons in its original form, a policy with the avowed object of causing the Government to advise the creation of Peers. Up to Saturday neither Mr. Balfour nor Lord Lansdowne had given any definite lead, but their views were understood to be different from those of the Halsbury group. Malcontents among the latter began to hint that Mr. Balfour must stand aside if he were not prepared to take a strong line ; and it became apparent that the dinner to Lord Halsbury might easily take the shape of a hostile demonstration against the official chief of the Conservative Party.

CHAPTER XVIII

THE ORDEAL OF MR. ASQUITH

MONDAY, July 24th, the day on which the Prime Minister was to make to the House of Commons formal announcement of his intention to create Peers, was to be a day notable in Parliamentary history. Feeling had risen high among the Conservatives during the week-end, for they saw now but too clearly that they had been out-generalled; that the Government had them surrounded, horse, foot, and artillery. Rarely have words of such fury torrented from a political party. Half-covered expressions of passionate astonishment at defeat were mingled with cursings at the Prime Minister and all his works. That Mr. Asquith had throughout really meant what he had said, seemed to be one of the things hardest for the extremists on the other side to bear. That he should actually intend to put into operation the severe procedure he had threatened, was a fact which outdistanced words. The *Times*—most dignified of newspapers—made this remark on the Saturday: "His present *coup d'état* puts the seal on his dishonour." Still wilder commentators declared that he ought to be impeached. Some members of the Opposition seemed unable to forgive Mr. Asquith that he had not been bluffing all the time. Among the

forward group of the party, passion was lashed by the suspicion that the leaders, Mr. Balfour and Lord Lansdowne, had decided that immediate surrender was now the only course—that consideration for the position of the monarch as well as consideration for the future of the party, called for the passage of the Parliament Bill without the addition to the House of Lords of a large number of new Liberal Peers. Baresark rage seized the “no surrender” stalwarts. Several Peers under Lord Halsbury and some of the more vigorous Commons, declared that they would submit to no such humiliation, and that they would die fighting if die they must. I have already given the argumentative reasons of the stalwarts for no surrender, and there must now be added the impulse of fighters who, with their backs to the wall, are made desperate by the thought that their leaders intend raising the white flag. Lord Halsbury, uncompromising, scornful, bitterly determined, fitly embodied the spirit that moved them.

The Prime Minister's letter to Mr. Balfour was the first official statement that the policy of Peer-making would be carried through in the event of defiance. Perhaps he would have been wiser (if less courteous) had he deferred the announcement to the Monday, when he was to make his speech in the House. Such a course would have served the Government's purpose equally well, and might very likely have saved Mr. Asquith from a nerve-trying, insulting episode, and saved the House of Commons from a discreditable blot on its reputation. The “no surrender” group in the Commons knew in effect what the Prime Minister was going to say; they knew that he was going to give to Parliament and to the world at large, the

announcement made briefly on Saturday to the Conservative leaders, and knew that he would elaborate his decision by argument. The brilliant, fanatical Lord Hugh Cecil and the far-seeing, audacious Mr. F. E. Smith, with the inconsiderable hot-bloods of the party, went down to Westminster early on the Monday afternoon, with political murder in their hearts.

Even if the proceedings had been calm and had been conducted with the ordinary Parliamentary decorum, the sitting of the House of Commons that afternoon must have been a memorable one. The Prime Minister was to tell the House that the King had consented to make enough Peers to pass the Parliament Bill. The beggarly creation of 12 Lords in 1711, the threatened creation of 80 in 1832, dropped into insignificance by the side of Mr. Asquith's proposals ; for it was generally accepted that he had secured an unlimited promise, and might find it necessary to advise the making of as many as 500 new Lords of Parliament. " Tremendous " is the only word for the expedient. His was it to show that the accumulated Liberal anger was no idle thing, that the proud words of the Lords when rejecting Liberal measures, were now only meeting with that reprisal which in these modern times, though it is often long in coming, always at last confronts caste assumptions which have not been sanctioned by the people in the country. On him was the responsibility of explaining that the opinion of the nation, as expressed in three successive elections—democratic Liberal opinion—was to be made operative, in spite of disturbances to the richer classes which it involved, in spite of the discomfort and strain that it might put on the monarch for the time being.

Members of the House of Commons knew that it was to be a thrilling day. The Benches were filled immediately after the Speaker had taken the chair, notwithstanding the fact that there were eighty questions to be put to Ministers before the principal business of the day was reached. The House was a-quiver with excitement from the moment business began, and questions were answered in a turmoil which made most of the replies inaudible a dozen feet from the Minister who was speaking. At the start there were two absentees from the Front Bench—Mr. Asquith and Mr. Balfour not coming in till questions were well on the way, but the fighting forwards were in their places, keen and eager for battle. In the corner seat below the gangway to the left of the Speaker was Lord Hugh Cecil, a lean, nervous figure, with face aflame, whose lively eyes and continual conversation with those near him told that he anticipated a field day. Above the gangway immediately behind the Front Bench were enthusiasts of lesser calibre—Mr. Goulding and Mr. Remnant catching the eye by reason of their surface eagerness and animated talk. In the same seat near them was Mr. F. E. Smith, one of the arch movers, prepared for all contingencies, but quite cool. Ministers were packed tightly on the Treasury Bench; and the Conservative leaders were crowded side by side facing them. Up in the gallery, over the clock, a score or more of Peers were crushed into the scanty accommodation; each of them too interested in the scene below to give any attention to physical inconvenience. Over all the gathering ran waves of emotion, rising and falling, but ever present, and filling the building with that rhythmic hum, deep and sinister and regular, which presages a rending

storm. No good humour was there in the noise. Spluttering epithets were tossed across the floor amid the surges. No student of humanity was required to see that elements of passion were near being unloosed, and that some little incident might send these men at each others' throats.

Midway through question-time Mr. John Redmond entered and took his place with the Nationalists, and at sight of him, there leapt forth ironic shouts of welcome. Here was the real hero of the day ; here was the man who had dictated the terms ; here was the man who had coerced the Prime Minister, and through him, had brought the Lords to their knees ! Why should he not be honoured ? To the victor, the spoils ! That was the bitter meaning of the cheers. There was not a long interval before feelings found another outlet. On the order paper appeared the usual sundry questions to the Prime Minister, and the fact that he had not come in when they were reached would not on an ordinary day have called for remark. But this afternoon, when his first question was reached, and it was found that he was not on the Treasury Bench, unofficial Conservatives demanded the reason. " Where is he ? " they shouted challengingly, " Where is he ? " Liberals affected to laugh. " Where is he ? " retorted the Conservatives rancorously, insistently.

As if in answer to the cries, Mr. Asquith within a minute or two came into the House. He entered from behind the Speaker's chair. He was wearing a frock-coat in place of his customary morning coat ; an indication, as a rule, that he had been to see the King. In his hand he had a sheaf of typewritten notes, his shoulders were squared ; his head strongly set. He walked slowly and composedly as usual. Withal, his face showed traces of the strain he

was undergoing, for it was hard as marble, and his eyes seemed strangely bright, without any expression in them. As he came into view, the New Liberal army, Liberals, Labour men, and Nationalists, broke into loud cheering. As an honourable tribute the long line of Ministers on the Treasury Bench rose as he began to pass in front of them to his place. The cheering rank and file rose up also, and, shouting enthusiastically, waved their order papers as a demonstration of joy at the arrival of their chieftain. It must have been one of the great rewards of life. Mr. Asquith would have been no man if his heart had not swelled under the music of those rushing cheers. The "no surrender" party on the Conservative Benches were hurling ugly words in the effort to drown or at least to modify the acclamations. A channel of vengeful passion was suddenly opened up. "Traitor," was the word united on. "Traitor!" thundered a score or more. "Traitor, traitor, traitor!"

The New Liberals took a deep breath. The outrage was so profound that it was at first hard to realise it. "Traitor, traitor!" rose the malignant chorus. Not often has the House rung with that word applied deliberately and of set purpose to a Prime Minister. I think some of the leading Conservatives were shocked—certainly the Liberals were. But the Labour men and the Radicals below the gangway promptly pulled themselves together and began shouting back across the floor with no less temper. That was the beginning of the greatest parliamentary scene I have witnessed.

A lull occurred a few minutes later, when Mr. Balfour entered. All the Conservatives rose to their feet and cheered as the Liberals had done at the in-coming of

Mr. Asquith, a little while before, and much warmth was displayed, though, of course, there was not the same reason as for the wild welcome given to the Prime Minister. Indeed, in the circumstances, the "no surrender" party, though they loyally cheered their chief, were a trifle doubtful of him, and whether he would show the fighting spirit which was thought to be essential.

At twenty-five minutes to four, Mr. Asquith rose to the Table to make his statement with regard to the Lords' amendments. He had had only time to smooth his typewritten notes on the despatch box, and to say, "Mr. Speaker, in offering the advice——" when a hurricane swept the words from his mouth. He stood firm, eyeing his attackers, apparently thinking that a momentary outburst stood between him and his speech; and after a few seconds he turned once more to the Speaker in order to begin again. The motion was enough. The storm rose to its most tremendous fury, and not a word could he utter. Dozens of different phrases were mingled in the assailing chorus. Some members shouted "'Vide, 'vide, 'vide, 'vide." Others again, "Where is Redmond?" But, vibrating through all the babel was that one deep all-pervading unchanging call of "Traitor!" The Speaker rose and, almost against their will, members hushed while he appealed to them to conform to the courtesies of debate. "Traitor, traitor!" volleyed back members. "He has degraded Parliament! This is no ordinary occasion." I could see Lord Hugh Cecil leaning forward from his corner seat, his head outstretched towards the Prime Minister, hurtling at him missiles of comment. Above the gangway, Mr. Goulding had half raised himself from his seat as though he desired to jump

bodily on the members of the Government. Near him was Mr. Remnant, rocking himself to and fro and roaring at the top of his voice. All that was said it was impossible to hear, but now and again phrases jumped into notice from the din like the spray whipped from the waves in some frightening storm at sea.

Liberals were retorting in kind. Members on each side were flinging out their arms at individuals opposite as they shot wrathful words at them. The state of the House may be imagined when I say that the great resonant cockney voice of Mr. Will Crooks was immediately drowned when he got up to put a point of order to the Speaker. Again and again Mr. Lowther, bringing into effect all his tact and persuasiveness, tried to secure quiet. High as was the respect in which he was held, he had to speak through a motley of protests and murmurings. He knew there was a great deal of excitement on both sides, he said, but he asked members very earnestly to give a courteous hearing to the Prime Minister. "I would ask them, as this is a serious occasion, to treat the occasion seriously, and to let the conduct of the House be worthy of its traditions." Lord Hugh Cecil was up in a moment, but the Ministerialists, recognising him as the ringleader, howled him into silence. He continued standing, waiting the arrival of the periodical interval of seconds when a voice might be heard, in order to throw in a poignant phrase. "I rise to respond to your appeal, Sir——" Bursts of mocking laughter prevented another syllable. "The best way to respond to my appeal would be to listen in silence," exclaimed the Speaker.

The clamour fluctuated, but never ceased. Sometimes it developed into pandemonium, at other times it sank to

a pitch which would allow a strong voice to make itself audible for a word or two. Every few minutes the Speaker was on his feet trying to produce quiet, but without avail. At these times Mr. Asquith would drop to his seat, and rise again immediately the Speaker's appeal was over, to resume that silent listening vigil at the Table, to face the stream of personal insults. Sometimes he managed to make a half-sentence heard, but his voice grew harsh with the effort. Like bullets the abusive words descended on him. "Trickster, Constitution-breaker, Traitor!" With whitening face, but with perfectly steady mien, he gazed first at one portion and then at another of the turbulent, swaying mob opposite to him.

For the discerning he was a picture of the emotions—this denounced Prime Minister. He had come to the House of Commons to state in carefully chosen words that the moment for making a change in our ancient constitution had arrived, that he intended to make it. He must have known that his announcement would be recorded in history. The King had approved of his statement; his followers in the Commons, whom he had knit into a devoted force, had assembled with high hearts to listen to these final clinching words. Once in a hundred years, perhaps, a British Prime Minister is the central figure in such a situation. Rising to his feet, Mr. Asquith found that not only would his opponents give him no hearing but were yelling at him offensive ejaculations which are ruled out of common converse. The shock was the greater because Mr. Asquith was always a stickler for courtesy, was always in Parliament an essentially dignified man, and never failed to mould his conduct and deportment on the great exemplars. He must have looked forward to

this sitting of Parliament as one which would afford the supreme hour of his career. He had risen to the Table with his speech in his hand, uplifted by the consciousness he had now to take his part in the making of the nation's story. And with these things singing through nerves and brain, he was confronted with irresponsible screaming hostility. I shall always remember him as he stood, rigid and contemptuous, and how, as the minutes went on, icy anger transformed him. At the beginning he had flattened out his manuscript on the despatch-box, as was his usual custom, but when the systematic disorder made itself apparent, he took it up and held it in his hand, and stood away from the Table a little, in order that he might swing the easier to see all his revilers. For five years in Parliament I had had the opportunity of watching Mr. Asquith closely, and his self-control, his extraordinary command over himself had become increasingly evident to me, and this afternoon, though his heart must have been a volcano of anger, he showed to the casual observer but little trace of feeling. Those of us, however, who knew him better, could see signs which were not to be misunderstood. He held himself very stiff, almost like a man in a trance, and his eyes seemed to sink in and become brighter, until they were but sparkling points in a face of pallor. As he stood there, silenced and helpless, the sympathy of all his army went out to him, and they launched great heartening shouts. For the first time it came upon many that Mr. Asquith was an old man. The ruddiness of strong manhood had left him, his hair was snow-white, his delicate white hand holding the unspoken speech was trembling. Only the stiff back, the reared head, the thin line of his lips, told of the virile spirit within him. With their

champion thus before them, there were periods when the Ministerialists were more genuinely frenzied than the far noisier men on the other side. The picture of their one man beaten down by a hundred, was almost too much for them. A Labour member in the corner seat below the gangway screamed with hoarse abandon at the taunts of Lord Hugh Cecil opposite ; Mr. M'Callum Scott, a Scottish Radical, jumped up with face transfigured, his fist extended towards the Conservatives. Friends near flung their arms around him and pulled him down.

Once, early in the scene, I noticed Mr. Balfour turn to the Conservatives behind him and say, "Order, order." He might as well have addressed quieting words to a sea gale. He gave up all attempts to interfere, and sat with bowed head, waiting for the storm to wear itself out. Possibly he recognised that any further effort on his part would have been resented by the "no surrender" group, and that he himself might have shared in the fate of the Prime Minister. The disturbance among the Conservatives was not below the gangway only ; it reached above the gangway, and through the seats immediately behind the leader ; indeed, except for the Front Bench, it was difficult to find a section of the Opposition who were not joining more or less in the outcry. Of course, there were individuals here and there who sat silent—silent and regretful—and to their honour some of them later made clear their detestation of the rowdyism they had witnessed. Moments came when the more violent seemed to lose all measure of their speech. Lord Hugh Cecil was livid with excitement, carried away by the consuming realisation that he was leading a righteous demonstration against black Asquithian iniquity. A score of times he darted to

his feet with phrases. The Liberals raved at him. Overjoyed was he. He writhed in his seat with delight at the din. Once or twice, when there was a lull in the uproar, and a chance that by shouting the Prime Minister might make a sentence or so heard, Lord Hugh, crouching low, with bent head kept up the loud unbroken monotone of "'Vide, 'vide, 'vide, 'vide," and set the storm going again. "Hold up your head, skulker," was one of the remarks addressed to him by a Labour member. He paid not the slightest attention. "'Vide, 'vide, 'vide, 'vide," he called. Not through any lack on his part should the Prime Minister be allowed to say a word. He was like a thing possessed with electrical energy. Once Mr. Asquith turned to Mr. Churchill and indicated Lord Hugh at work; with a wondering gesture, as though the member for Oxford University were a creature devoid of reason.

At four o'clock, Mr. Asquith, by straining his voice, managed to get in a few consecutive sentences in which he made a reference to the death of King Edward. "Who killed the King?" roared the revolvers. "Who killed the King?" At this fresh outrage, Mr. Burns, who was seated near the Prime Minister, appeared to be begging his chief to sit down and give up his obnoxious task. Mr. Churchill apparently joined in the supplication. For some time Mr. Asquith would not yield. The uproar seemed, however, to increase instead of to decrease as time went on, and at a quarter-past four, Mr. Asquith showed that he despaired of making himself heard by quickly turning over his manuscript to the last page. His exasperated supporters were jubilant at the action. "I will not degrade myself further——" "You could not," came the hot exclamation, "you are a disgrace!" "I will

not degrade myself further by endeavouring to press my arguments upon the attention of honourable gentlemen opposite, who are obviously resolved not to listen to me." Then, in two or three sentences he explained, by straining his voice, that the Government intended to invoke the exercise of the prerogative of the Crown, if the Lords were obstinate. He sat down amid rolling shouts of encouragement from Ministerialists, and a chorus of "Traitor" from the Opposition.

What followed Mr. Asquith's speech was the most dramatic feature of a dramatic day. In the course of his attempts to ameliorate the savage hubbub, the Speaker had suggested to the shouters that it was not likely when Mr. Balfour got up to speak the incensed Liberals would allow him to say anything. Revenge, he pointed out, was almost inevitable. Fiercely the Conservatives had shouted on. The Liberals, Labour men, and Nationalists were, it must be remembered, in a white heat of temper at the treatment given to Mr. Asquith. Their feelings, as I have indicated, were such that an outbreak of physical violence was among the possibilities of the half-hour. Among the men so heated and enraged hurried the Liberal whips; explaining the possibilities of a stabbing revenge. That was how it came about the House had such a surprise when Mr. Balfour rose to speak. The whole of the army of New Liberals dropped to the politest silence. Bravado was in that silence, but it was a very fine bravado. Stirred to the depths, these politicians, including a generous sprinkling of Labour men who had worked with their hands, had set themselves with clenched teeth to give a lesson in courtesy to the noisiest spirits of the party which claimed to represent

the gentlemen of England. There was tenseness in the silence, but the silence was nevertheless very real. Lord Hugh Cecil put on an air of completest indifference, and some of those who had been most turbulent with him accepted with a certain assured complacency the tribute of respect which it was fitting and right that the army opposite should pay to the leader of the Conservative party. As for Mr. Balfour, a man of very chivalrous nature, I think he found that courteous hearing a little trying. He began by expressing regret that Mr. Asquith had not been heard—though he sought to avoid offence to the “No surrender” group by remarking that the proceedings of the Government must necessarily excite deep and passionate feelings.

Mr. Balfour’s subsequent arguments could not possibly have their due weight having regard to the electric atmosphere of the House. Members were more interested in two brief interruptions from the Prime Minister. In his indictment of Ministers, Mr. Balfour used the following words:—

“For the Government to come down in the middle of a crisis, and in order to bring a crisis to an end to ask for these unconstitutional powers, I think that is beyond pardon. But that they should do so in cold blood, months before the crisis arose, before they knew how it would be used, and, above all, before the King could have known how it would be used, surely that will mark this administration in the history of all administrations as the one least sedulous to keep intact the treasure committed to them and the most utterly regardless of all the duties which devolve upon the advisers of a constitutional monarch. It was an amazing and a most unqualifiable proceeding. What was the reason for it? The only reason——”

Mr. Asquith rose to the Table : " The right honourable gentleman has not heard the reason because I was not allowed to state it."

A minute later Mr. Balfour expressed his doubt as to whether the Prime Minister would have dealt with a certain point even if he had been heard. Mr. Asquith, his eyes blazing with anger, rose again. He spoke very deliberately, but a glance was sufficient to know that to his finger-tips he was tingling. " I was going, had I been permitted the courtesy never before refused to a leader of this House, to give a detailed and reasoned argument of the grounds for the advice which His Majesty's Government have tendered to the Sovereign."

" When ? " called out some of the Conservatives. The Prime Minister turned on them. " I decline absolutely to answer any question now. I was not allowed to do so." He thrust a lurid face across the Table towards Mr. Balfour. " I was prevented by the right honourable gentleman's friends from doing so. He has had an advantage of a courtesy which has been denied to me."

When Mr. Balfour had finished his speech, Sir Edward Grey, the Foreign Secretary, got up from the side of the Prime Minister to address the House. Aloofness of manner and calm independence of thought had helped to secure for Sir Edward Grey a remarkable position in the House of Commons. His conduct of foreign affairs was endorsed by both sides, his dignity and reserve gave all men a strange respect for him. He was not an extreme politician, but was quite fearless. His appearance fitted in to help the general impression. With the touch of youth still on him, he was tall and serious looking, with classic features and raven hair, such a man as one reads

of in the great romances. A tragic domestic bereavement just at the time when he was promoted to high office, robbed life of much for him, and black was always in his dress from that time onward. No statesman was there for whom the House of Commons had a more lofty regard. His very coldness and disdain of popular words endeared him the more. This was the man who now rose to hold aloft the banner of his chief, and to utter a warning to his opponents. His words, delivered with unusual feeling, stirred great gusts of enthusiasm on the Ministerial Benches at every few sentences.

“Never did any leader of a party of a majority in the House of Commons have behind him a more chivalrous personal loyalty, a more united political support than my right honourable friend the Prime Minister has at this moment. The feelings of the majority as well as those of the minority are deep and strong. Members opposite may easily imagine whether those feelings are less strong after the scene we have just witnessed. In so far as it was a personal discourtesy to the Prime Minister, every one of us resents it. The Prime Minister has announced the course of the Government. If arguments are to be used in support of that course they are arguments to be used by the Prime Minister as representing all of us. If those arguments are not to be listened to from him there is not one of us who will attempt to take his place.” Ministers on the Treasury Bench led the loud cheer which followed this announcement, and the warmth of the demonstration brought a touch of pink to the Prime Minister’s pale cheeks. Sir Edward Grey finished his speech by moving the adjournment of the debate. Mr. F. E. Smith got up to speak. The Ministerialists were in

no mood to extend any patience to one who had helped to lead the earlier disorder, and they howled at him unceasingly. At last the Speaker took action.

"I remind the House," he said, "of Standing Order No. 21, which says, 'In the case of grave disorder arising in the House the Speaker may, if he thinks it necessary to do so, adjourn the House without question put or suspend any sitting for a time to be named by him.' In my opinion a case of grave disorder has arisen, and, acting under the authority of the rule, I now adjourn the House."

Cheering from the Ministerialists was met by retaliating cries from the Conservatives, and as the Speaker left the chair, members began to converge from the benches into an excited crowd on the floor of the House. Provocative cries still rang from side to side of the chamber, but the confused mass of members, talking, arguing, denouncing, slowly gravitated to the lobbies. The excitement of the day had been crammed into a short sitting. The House which met at a quarter to three had separated at eight minutes past five.

Later in the evening Mr. Asquith's unspoken speech was issued to the Press. The first part of it no doubt was exactly as it would have been delivered; the second part contained notes with reference to the precedent of 1832, notes which one supposes would have been linked together by the Prime Minister, had he been permitted to speak. This is the speech as it came from Mr. Asquith's hands.

"In offering the advice which the Government think it right at this juncture to tender to the House, I must once more recall the facts, familiar as they are, which from a Parliamentary point of view place this Bill in an almost unique category. The principle upon which it is

founded and the main lines upon which it is drawn, were affirmed and approved by the House of Commons as far back as the year 1907. At the general election, in the year 1910, which followed rejection by the House of Lords of the Budget, this principle took its place in the forefront of party controversy, was debated upon every platform, and became the predominant issue of the election. In the new House of Commons, resolutions embodying all, or almost all, its detailed provisions were carried by large majorities, the Bill itself was introduced, and no one doubts that, but for the death of the King and the temporary truce which ensued, it would have been passed in that session through all its stages and sent to another place. The conference which followed proved that with the best will and the most strenuous efforts, a settlement by agreement was impossible. The Bill was then presented to the House of Lords, and was laid aside in favour of an alternative scheme put forward by Lord Lansdowne on behalf of the responsible leaders of the Opposition, and of which the novel and at the same time the governing (so far as conflicts between the two Houses are concerned) principle was the introduction and application of the Referendum. Another general election followed in December, 1910. The people now had before them on the one hand this Bill itself in all its details, both principle and machinery ; on the other hand, the counter-proposals of the Opposition, which, especially in regard to the Referendum, were vigorously defended on the one side and as vigorously attacked on the other in every constituency in the country. What was the result ? A majority for the Government of 60 in Great Britain, of 120 in the United Kingdom as a whole.

“ In a word, it is true to say of this Bill, in a sense in which it would not be true of any Bill in our Parliamentary history, that it was the main issue of two elections, and that by no form of Referendum that could be devised could the opinion of the electorate upon it have been more carefully ascertained or more clearly pronounced.

“ The Bill was approved, as I have said, both as to its principle and as to its machinery. That is important, because, as I shall show in a moment, the main purpose and effect of the amendments made in the House of Lords is, in regard to matters of the greatest importance, to set that machinery aside, and to replace it by a new and, as I think, a worse edition of the very expedient which the electors, when consulted, deliberately rejected.

“ It is a mistake, indeed it is a misrepresentation, to allege that the Government have shown themselves indisposed to accept changes consistent with the main principle and purpose of the Bill. On the contrary, in committee, here, on clause 1, we consented to amendments confining the clause to public bills, excluding all matters that dealt only with local taxation, and amplifying and rendering more precise the enumeration of the classes of bills which alone were [to be entitled to the relatively privileged position conferred by the clause. In the same spirit, in clause 2, we accepted amendments to protect its machinery against possible, though as we thought most improbably, risks of abuse. If the amendments made by the House of Lords were of the same or a similar class : if they were, as I see they are, strangely described by a most reverend prelate, who on this occasion seems to have lost touch with the realities of the situation, ‘ safeguarding ’ amendments ; if they were not, in fact—whatever

may have been their intention—the substitution for the Bill in its main features of the alternative repudiated less than a year ago by the electorate, we should have been prepared to ask the House even now to give them respectful consideration.

“Let me make good in a few words the description I have just given of the general effect of the Lord’s amendments. Their most novel feature is undoubtedly the creation of a new tribunal which is to be, in effect, predominant over the House of Commons in matters of finance, and over both Houses in all legislative matters which the tribunal holds to be at once of great gravity and insufficiently considered by the electorate. And how is this junta to be composed? It is, in its latest form—an improvement, I admit, due to Lord St. Aldwyn, on the original proposal—to consist of the Lord Chancellor, the Speaker, the Lord Chamberlain, Chairman of Ways and Means, a Lord of Appeal chosen by and from persons who have held high judicial office, and a member of this House appointed by the Speaker.

“Just consider the functions which, for the first time; it is proposed—for I do not suggest that any one had the courage to submit this part of the scheme to the electorate—to entrust to such a body. Take, first, finance. It is not a question merely of associating with the Speaker some two or three men of experience for the purpose of considering whether the bill does or does not fall within any of the categories set out in clause 1. That is a very different matter. I believe that in the course of our debates, when we were settling the specific enumeration of bills which alone were to be deemed to be money bills—so as to avoid the possible abuse of tacking—I described

as their general qualification that their governing and not merely their incidental purpose should be financial. But, as the House will remember, I was most careful throughout to make it clear that the only safe way of dealing with such a matter was to eschew general language, and to describe specifically, and with precision, what bills were, and what were not, to be deemed of a financial character. The House of Lords, seizing upon my phrase, and using it for the very purpose which I deprecated, propose that this joint committee can, at their discretion, remove from the uncontrolled jurisdiction of the House of Commons any Bill if, in their opinion, the governing purpose of the bill; or any portion of it, is such as to bring it within the category of general legislation.

“ I do not hesitate to say that there is not a single one of the great Budgets of the last seventy years which might not conceivably and even plausibly be brought within the ambit of these words. If we were to assent to any such proposal—and it is not a question of language but of substance—we should be deliberately putting the House of Commons, by Act of Parliament, in a lower and weaker position as regards finance than it has occupied for two hundred years. A strange result, indeed, of the emphatic condemnation by the electors of the rejection of the Budget of 1909.

“ But even more serious, and with all respect, I must say more grotesque, are the functions assigned to the junta under the celebrated Lansdowne amendment to clause 2. That amendment begins by excluding absolutely from the operation of the clause bills affecting the existence of the Crown or the Protestant Succession ; no one is likely to use the Parliament Bill for such a purpose.

It goes on to another specific exclusion—that of measures establishing National Parliaments, Assemblies or Councils, with legislative powers in any part of the United Kingdom. Why, one may ask, is this, of all forms of constitutional or organic change, the one selected for express mention? What, for example, of the Established Church, or of franchise and re-distribution, or of a change in the number and composition of the Second Chamber itself? I believe that some noble lords, whose hatred and fear of Home Rule does not wholly blind them to other possible developments in the field of political emancipation, ventured to put these questions or some of them. They were referred for reassurance to subsection C, which empowers the joint committee on reference to exclude from the normal working of clause 2 any measure of any kind provided in their opinion it raises an issue of great gravity (whatever that means) and the judgment of the country has not been sufficiently (whatever that means) ascertained. And what is to happen then? Why, the measure in question is to be submitted for approval to the electors in manner to be hereafter provided by Act of Parliament.

“This, sir, is the proposal which is deliberately put forward by the Opposition late in the eleventh hour of this constitutional controversy, and, as the archbishop solemnly assures us, for the purpose of safeguarding our Bill against possible abuse. Just see what, in practice, it would mean. A Bill is brought in, say, for Welsh Dis-establishment. It is passed by the House of Commons in three successive sessions, at least two years having elapsed between the date of its second reading in the first and its passing in the third of those sessions. Under these conditions it would, notwithstanding rejection by

the House of Lords by virtue of clause 2, pass automatically on to the statute book. But under the Lansdowne amendment all that the House of Lords has to do is to carry a resolution requiring a reference to the joint committee which must thereupon be assembled. And then these six gentlemen are solemnly to meet together and determine—and remember their determination, the determination of this wholly irresponsible body, is final and conclusive in all courts of law—they are to go through the farce of appearing to determine whether a bill, passed in three successive sessions through the House of Commons against the House of Lords, in their opinion raises an issue of great gravity, and whether, some three years before, the judgment of the country had or had not been ‘sufficiently ascertained.’ And what then? The measure (say a measure for Welsh Disestablishment) is to go separately to a Referendum to the electors of the United Kingdom in manner to be hereafter provided by Act of Parliament. By what sort of an Act of Parliament? In the mean time the whole of this Bill is to be hung up. Nowhere and at no time has such a proposal been put forward in the whole domain of constitutional experiment. Is this what the electors voted for last December?

“No, sir, these amendments, taken as a whole, amount to a rejection of our Bill. What would happen if they were to be incorporated in the measure? When you have a Unionist majority in both Houses, the whole thing becomes a dead letter. Matters remain exactly as they are. Measures of the utmost gravity and most far-reaching effect may be passed in defiance of public opinion over the heads of the electorate. You live, in fact, under unchecked and undiluted single-chamber government.

But, with a Liberal Government in power, you would have a House of Commons fettered beyond all its predecessors in the control of finance, and in all cases where an irresponsible and non-representative body independent of both Houses should so determine, every deadlock will be settled and settled only by a Referendum *ad hoc*. In other words, the Bill in its present form is a direct contradiction and a flat negation of the decision of the country. What, then, ought to be done, and in particular what ought to be the attitude of this House in the situation so created? We tried—the leaders on both sides tried—to settle this controversy last year by conference and agreement. That attempt, unhappily, came to nothing. Lord Lansdowne tells us that there are some, at all events, of the amendments which the Lords have introduced into the Bill which in their view are so essential that they would certainly not be prepared to recede from them in substance so long as they remained free agents. I assume, of course, that this language refers to amendments like his own, and I have to say in reply on behalf of the Government, and I believe on the majority of the House of Commons, that to such amendments we cannot and shall not see our way to accede.

“We have, therefore, come to the conclusion, and thought it courteous and right to communicate that conclusion in advance to leaders of the Opposition, that unless the House of Commons is prepared to concede these essential points, there is only one constitutional way of escape from what would otherwise be an absolute deadlock. It is the method of resort to the prerogative which is recognised by the most authoritative exponents of constitutional law and practice, by writers such as

Erskine May, Bagehot, and Dicey, when, as is here the case, the House of Commons must be presumed to represent on the matter in dispute the deliberate decision of the nation. But it is not necessary to rely on the dicta of text writers, however eminent. For the precedent of 1832 is what the lawyers call a case precisely in point. As we are accused by ignorant people of being responsible for a *coup d'état*, or, at any rate, of an unprecedented breach in the practice of the constitution, I think it is worth while to go in some little detail into the history of that transaction.

“ Duke of Wellington defeated. Lord Grey in office, late in 1830.

“ No Reform Bill before country at previous elections.

“ 1831. March 1st.—Bill introduced.

“ March 22nd.—Second reading carried by majority of one.

“ April 19th.—On General Gascoyne's amendment, Government defeated in this House by majority of eight.

“ They at once advised King to dissolve.

“ 1831, May.—General election.

“ July 6th.—Second reading Commons ; majority, 136. Went up to Lords.

“ October 7th.—Second reading rejected (House of Lords), 41.

“ No second dissolution, but Parliament prorogued and Bill re-introduced in Commons.

“ Passed through all stages there, and went up to Lords a second time.

“ 1832, May 6th.—Second reading in Lords ; majority nine.

“ May 7th.—Lyndhurst’s amendment (on going into committee).

“ It was at this stage that Ministers asked the Sovereign to authorise them, if necessary, to use the royal prerogative of creation. William IV. refused, and Lord Grey resigned.

“ Ten days.—Abortive attempt of Lyndhurst and Wellington to form Government (Peel standing aloof).

“ May 17th.—Grey recalled, King giving written consent ‘to create such number of Peers as will be sufficient to ensure passing of Reform Bill.’

“ Lord Grey announced in House of Lords that he had now confident security of passing Reform Bill unimpaired in its principles and in all its essential details.

“ The Bill was carried without its being necessary to resort to prerogative. But every one knows that it would not have been carried unless Lord Grey had requested and the King had consented to the exercise to any extent that might be necessary of the power of creation. Lord Grey was attacked, as I am now, for advising an unconstitutional course.

“ This is what he said in reply :—

“ ‘ (May 17th, 1832).—We were under the necessity of offering the advice to create as many new Peers as would carry the measure of reform through this House unmutilated in any of its essential provisions, or resign our offices. Now I say that, under these circumstances, the advice to create new Peers was required. The noble and learned lord says that it was not constitutional ; but I say that it was constitutional, and I can refer him to books of authority on the subject in which it is distinctly asserted that one of the uses of vesting the prerogative of creating new Peers in the Crown is to prevent the

possibility of the recurrence of those evils which must otherwise result from a permanent collision between the two Houses of Parliament ; and this danger was rendered imminent by the opposition made to the Reform Bill by the noble lords on the other side of the House. And, I ask, what would be the consequences if we were to suppose that such a prerogative did not exist, or could not be constitutionally exercised ? The Commons have a control over the power of the Crown by the privilege, in extreme cases, of refusing the supplies, and the Crown has, by means of its power to dissolve the House of Commons, a control upon any violent or rash proceedings on the part of the Commons ; but if a majority of this House (House of Lords) is to have the power whenever they please of opposing the declared and decided wishes both of the Crown and the people, without any means of modifying that power, then this country is placed entirely under the influence of an uncontrollable oligarchy. I say that if a majority of this House should have the power of acting adversely to the Crown and the Commons, and was determined to exercise that power without being liable to check or control, the constitution is completely altered, and the government of this country is not a limited monarchy ; it is no longer, my lords, the Crown ; the Lords, and Commons, but a House of Lords—a separate oligarchy—governing absolutely the others. On these grounds we tendered that advice to His Majesty which we were well justified by the spirit and by the letter of the constitution in tendering ; nay, more, which, under the circumstances, it was our imperative duty to tender, considering the consequences that were likely to result from the failure of the measure.'

“ We cannot then doubt, Sir, that the advice we have tendered to the Crown—and which the Crown has accepted—is warranted by constitutional principles, and that we are following in spirit and almost to the letter the precedent set by the great Whig statesman of 1832. I need hardly add that we do not desire to see the prerogative exercised, and that we trust that the necessity for its exercise may be avoided. There is nothing derogatory or humiliating to a great party in admitting defeat. No one asks them to accept that defeat as final. They have only to convince their fellow-countrymen that they are right and we are wrong, and they can repeal our Bill. Believing, as we do, that the chances of a satisfactory issue may thereby be improved, I do not propose to-day to ask the House to take any action in regard to the Lords’ amendments, but in due course to adjourn this debate.”

CHAPTER XIX

MR. BALFOUR WITHSTANDS THE STALWARTS

ON the day after the scene in the House of Commons, the Conservative leaders showed that they realised the seriousness of the party position. It became known that Lord Lansdowne had sent the following letter to each of the Conservative peers :—

“Lansdowne House,
“July 24th, 1911.

“MY LORD,

“The announcement made by the Prime Minister leaves no room for doubt that His Majesty’s Government are now empowered to force the passage of the Parliament Bill through the House of Lords by means of a practically unlimited creation of Peers.

“We shall, therefore, have to decide whether, by desisting from further opposition, we shall render it possible for His Majesty’s Government to carry the Bill in the House of Lords as at present constituted, or whether, by insisting on our amendments, we shall bring about a creation of Peers in numbers which may overwhelm the present House and paralyse its action in the future, without in any way retarding the passage of the Parliament Bill.

“I have come to the conclusion that the former alternative is preferable in the interests of the House, the Unionist Party, and the country.

“ Nor can I bring myself to believe that our supporters will not realise that we are no longer free agents, and that the course which I have indicated involves no responsibility for the Bill and no complicity with those who are promoting it.

“ It is of the utmost importance that I should be made aware of the views of those Peers who usually act with us, and I should therefore be grateful if your lordship would, with the least possible delay, let me know whether you are prepared to support me in the course which I feel it my duty to recommend.

“ I have the honour to be, my lord,

“ Yours faithfully,

“ LANSDOWNE.”

Late on Tuesday night a manifesto came from Mr. Balfour in the shape of a letter to Lord Newton. It was as follows :—

“ 4, Carlton Gardens, Pall Mall, S.W.,

“ July 25th, 1911.

“ MY DEAR NEWTON,

“ You ask me my opinion on the present situation ; and, in particular, on the course which the Peers should take when the Parliament Bill is sent back to the Upper House. I have never conceived it to be part of my duty actively to intervene in the affairs of a House to which I do not belong, nor have I on the present occasion taken any share in the propaganda which is, I understand, being vigorously conducted by some of its members. But this is not because I have any doubts as to the advice which I ought to give to those who seek it. On the contrary, my views are clear. I think the majority in the House of Lords should support its leader ; I agree with the advice Lord Lansdowne has given to his friends ; with Lord Lansdowne I stand ; with Lord Lansdowne I am ready, if need be, to fall.

“ So far as your direct question is concerned this is, I suppose, a sufficient answer. But I should convey an entirely wrong impression of my opinions on the present situation if I allowed it to stand alone. For the present situation is grave, even alarming, not merely because we are in the power of an unscrupulous and revolutionary Government, but because the real character of the peril by which we are menaced and the true methods of meeting it are obscured in the eyes of so many Unionists by the clouds of controversy which have arisen round (what I consider) the quite secondary point on which you have consulted me.

“ We hear it said that the Lords should ‘ fight to the last,’ that they should be ready to ‘ perish but not to yield,’ that they should ‘ do their duty irrespective of consequences,’ and so on. I agree. It is all quite true ; but is it all quite relevant ? Is there anything that deserves to be called ‘ fighting ’ in the course recommended by those friends of ours who are canvassing against Lord Lansdowne ? Is it heroic ? Is there the faintest resemblance between the Peer who proposes to vote for restoring the Lords’ amendments to the Parliament Bill and the soldier who dies at his post fighting against overwhelming odds ?

“ To suppose so is surely to misunderstand the whole situation. I do not for one moment doubt that, were courage and self-sacrifice required, these virtues would be forthcoming in abundance. But they are not required either from those who propose to vote or from those who propose to abstain from voting. There is no fighting in the matter. The crime of the Government is that by a gross misuse of the prerogative they have made the Second Chamber powerless, and fighting in any effective sense impossible. Fighting means, or ought to mean, something real. It means damaging the enemy, hampering his operations, perhaps defeating him ; if he wins, making even his victories costly. I fail to see how the course proposed by those who refuse to follow Lord

Lansdowne is to attain any of these objects. I fail to see that it resembles any serious military operation, or requires the exercise of any military virtue.

"There are some who talk as if Lord Lansdowne and we who agree with him were in favour of 'compromise.' This is a delusion. Compromise may sometimes be a most excellent thing; but there is no room for it here. The Government have tyrannically destroyed, so far as the Parliament Bill is concerned, every real power which the Second Chamber possesses. They have in their own fashion imitated Cromwell, without either his excuses or his genius. The crime has been committed. It can neither be qualified nor condoned. Compromise is impossible. What, then, ought the Unionist Party to do? Ought we, amid the clatter of divided counsels, to quarrel over a procedure *within* the House of Lords which at the best can be no more than an ineffectual parade? Or ought we to prepare for the great struggle beyond its walls which the tyranny of the Government has made inevitable? Without doubt, the latter.

"Let us, then, if we can, agree. Let the Unionists in the Upper House follow their trusted leader. But if this be impossible, if differ we must, if there be Peers who (on this occasion) are resolved to abandon Lord Lansdowne, if there be politicians outside who feel constrained to applaud them, let us all at least remember that the campaign for the restoration of constitutional liberty is but just begun, that this is but an episode in it, and that unless the forces conducting it possess unity and discipline, ultimate victory is impossible. It would, in my opinion, be a misfortune if the present crisis left the House of Lords weaker than the Parliament Bill by itself will make it; but it would be an irreparable tragedy if it left us a divided party.

"Yours very sincerely;

"ARTHUR JAMES BALFOUR."

The meeting which Mr. Balfour was to have addressed

in the city of London was abandoned for reasons which it is supposed included a division of opinion on the topic of the day amongst those responsible for it. The Stalwarts, much encouraged by the course of events, made the dinner to Lord Halsbury an opportunity for rallying speeches, and a declaration of fighting to the end. They mingled their battle-cries with protestations of unswerving affection for Mr. Balfour (with whom they temporarily differed on the question of tactics); but no one was deceived, and certainly Mr. Balfour was not deceived. Clear was it that an attempt was being made to stultify Mr. Balfour's authority.

For days the battle raged unremittingly. Conservative newspapers as well as Conservative politicians were divided. The *Morning Post*, the *Pall Mall Gazette*, and the *Observer* vehemently supported the "Die Hards," as the "No Surrender" Party were called; and the *Times*, the *Daily Telegraph*, and the *Daily Mail* called on the party for loyalty to their proven leaders. The Government stood by, awaiting events, holding their hand; they had decided to allow Lord Lansdowne a full opportunity of trying to secure the passage of the Parliament Bill in its original shape, without the creation of new Peers.

Fresh nomenclature was devised almost from day to day. Mr. Balfour's adherents were called "Scuttlers," and Lord Halsbury's men "Ditchers" (from their expressed determination to perish in the last ditch). Then the sober *Times* adopted colloquialisms so far as to refer to the two sides as "Hedgers" and "Ditchers." The division in the party is sufficiently shown by a list of some of those who ranged themselves on each side. These were the protagonists.

Official Unionists.

Mr. Balfour.
Lord Lansdowne.
Lord Curzon.
Sir W. Anson.
Mr. Lyttelton.

No-Surrender party.

Lord Halsbury.
Lord Selborne.
Mr. Austen Chamberlain
Lord Salisbury.
Mr. George Wyndham.
Sir Edward Carson.
Mr. F. E. Smith.

An extraordinary admission was made by the *Times*, the leading Conservative daily journal, on July 26th, in pressing the policy of Mr. Balfour and Lord Lansdowne; the following words appearing in its principal leading article: "The one solid fact in all this speculation is that the Parliament Bill with all its faults, was before the electorate in December, and that no one seriously believes that the electorate has changed its mind. If the Lords in truth abide by their established criterion, the people's will, their cause is settled by that fact alone." Well might the Stalwarts ask, in view of this acknowledgment, what became of all the months of angered opposition to the Bill?

As the days went on, a large number of Conservative Peers signified their decision to stand by Lord Lansdowne; but the Halsbury group were by no means disheartened, for they knew that they had always a good chance of compelling the creation of Peers—provided always that they could rely on Lord Lansdowne's followers abstaining from voting, and not supporting the Government.

The spirit animating the Stalwarts was shown in a letter written by Mr. Austen Chamberlain to Lord Willoughby de Broke:—

" DEAR WILLOUGHBY DE BROKE,

" Your telegram reaches me just as I am leaving town. I am very sorry I cannot be with you to-morrow. I need not say that my conviction that Lord Halsbury's course is right is unshaken. I trust that he will adhere to it whatever happens, and be the members that support him many or few. The firmness of himself and the other Peers who act with him will save our party from disgrace and our cause from disaster. Nothing else will.

' Yours very sincerely,

" AUSTEN CHAMBERLAIN."

When it is remembered that Mr. Austen Chamberlain was Chancellor of the Exchequer under Mr. Balfour, and was his principal supporter in the House of Commons, the significance of the letter is apparent. He implied plainly that Mr. Balfour's course of action was bringing disgrace on the Conservative Party, and disaster on their cause. It may be of interest to mention here that at the Halsbury dinner Mr. Chamberlain was greeted with a cry of " Our future Prime Minister." All this time the leaders of the two groups were meeting in the House of Commons day by day for the ordinary Parliamentary business, and the picture of Mr. Balfour and Mr. Austen Chamberlain seated side by side apparently on the best of terms and in the most perfect agreement on all matters of State was an absorbing spectacle. I remember a particular afternoon when Mr. Wyndham sat on one side of Mr. Balfour and Mr. Chamberlain on the other. The philosophic statesman, head of the party, had his arms folded, and was lost in thoughtful gaze at the roof of the House. Mr. Austen Chamberlain whispered a remark. Calmly and slowly Mr. Balfour diverted his gaze from the roof to a point a few inches in front of Mr. Chamberlain's

face; uttered half a dozen placid words; and then turned his eyes aloft again. His expression was that of one lost to memories of music. I do not think Mr. Balfour was thinking of music.

With all these cross-currents in full force among their opponents, the Government were in a rather trying position. Naturally they wished to avoid if they could the creation of new Peers at all, but if Peers were necessary they were anxious only to create sufficient for their purpose, and accordingly for them the situation had peculiar difficulties. At the utmost their supporters in the division lobby in the Lords could not be reckoned beyond 80. Lord Lansdowne's Peers who had offered to abstain from voting numbered between 300 and 400. The Halsbury Stalwarts would total, it was calculated, something between 60 and 90. Subtracting the bishops, the peers kept away by ill-health or absence abroad, there remained a residuum of about 100 members whose intentions were undeclared and from whom might come further support for the Stalwarts. The Government could not send back the Bill (without the creation of new Peers) unless pretty well satisfied that it would pass the Lords. Lord Lansdowne was in no position to pledge its passage. That was the situation.

Every morning the newspapers on each side counted heads afresh, and proceeded to draw inferences as to what would happen in the following week. Conservative Peers who differed from each other as to the course of procedure, wrote hot and argumentative letters for publication; while Lord Morley went on with his work of making his census of Liberal Peers so that the Government might know exactly how they stood for the fateful division day.

Matters developed somewhat strangely. Lord Lansdowne was pledged to abstain from voting against the Bill when it came back, and the greater number of the Conservative peers stated their intention of following his example. The Stalwarts, not to be placated, were determined to go into the lobby against the Government, and their number variously estimated was never by the most sanguine put at more than a hundred. The high-water mark of the Government support remained at about eighty, and the fate of the Bill therefore was in the balance till the last moment. The expedient of creating a score or so of Peers at once in order to get over the difficulty was denied to the Government, because, if they did so, a good many of Lord Lansdowne's followers would have taken offence and voted them down—the condition of abstinence being that no new Peers were made.

The statement crept round that if Lord Halsbury and his friends persisted in voting against the Bill when it returned from the Commons, a group of independent Conservative Peers would go into the lobby for the Government. The fury at this suggestion was remarkable. The Stalwarts prophesied political death and ignominy for any Peer who dared such treachery. Several Peers, quite undeterred, definitely stated their intention of voting for the much-hated measure, if by that measure alone the creation of new Peers could be prevented. The Stalwarts cursed their erstwhile colleagues with a vehemence and a directness which left nothing to the imagination; if corrosive words could have killed, nothing would have been left of the independent Conservative Peers for the great day of the division. Lord Lansdowne, though not directly affected, flinched under the blistering

phrases, and he wrote the following letter to Lord Camperdown :—

“Lansdowne House,
“July 31st, 1911.

“MY DEAR CAMPERDOWN,

“You published in the *Times* of the 28th instant, an important letter in which you announced that you were prepared, when the Parliament Bill came back to the House of Lords, to vote with the Government if by so doing you could help to avoid a creation of Peers.

“During the last few days I have been repeatedly asked whether I was in favour of the course which you are yourself prepared to take, and whether I was in any way responsible for your suggestion.

“I am anxious that there should be no room for doubt as to the course which I have recommended to those who are good enough to support me in the House of Lords. My advice has been in favour of abstention from voting, and, in order to make my position clear, I may add that in no circumstances should I consider myself justified in voting with the Government when the Bill returns to our House.

“I am, my dear Camperdown,

“Yours sincerely,

“LANSDOWNE.”

The political world looked forward to the week commencing Sunday, August 6th, with eagerness, for every day in Parliament promised to have its sensation. On Monday, Mr. Balfour was to move a vote of censure on the Government, and on Tuesday a similar vote of censure was to be moved in the Lords by Lord Curzon, while the Commons were going on with the interrupted discussion of the Lords' amendments to the Bill. On Wednesday the Bill denuded of the Lords' proposals was to go back

How I wish to see it

to the Upper House for discussion and decision. On that day or the following day there would be the much-talked-of division which was to bring defeat or victory not only to the Government, but to the prestige as leaders of Mr. Balfour and Lord Lansdowne. On Friday if the Stalwarts had triumphed, swift vengeful, necessary action by the Government was to be effected. It will be seen that each day had its potentiality. Events did not disappoint expectation.

CHAPTER XX

THE KING AND THE CABINET

THE vote of censure moved by Mr. Balfour on August 7th had the effect of uniting temporarily sundered Conservatives, and all joined together in a thunderous condemnation of the Government. The Stalwarts in the Commons mourned in passing the decadent spirit of their titular leaders, but were content to swamp their regret in passion at Ministerial wickedness. The varying degrees of damnatory phrase among the Conservatives gave a good deal of zest to the proceedings, but the real interest of the debate lay in Mr. Asquith's narrative of what had occurred between the King and Ministers with regard to the promise to create Peers.

When the constitutional Conference broke up at the end of 1910, there were communications between the Cabinet and the Sovereign which led to the knowledge that if the New Liberals should, after a general election, come back again with an adequate majority the exercise of the prerogative would be lent to them for the passage of the Parliament Bill. All the story from the time of the momentous announcement of April 14th, 1910, was related to a deeply attentive House of Commons by Mr. Asquith. The key-note was given to his explanations

by his answer to a question before the debate began. Mr. Balfour asked whether he could state to the House the date on which he gave to His Majesty the advice that peers should be created, and Mr. Asquith replied—

“The advice referred to by the right honourable gentleman and accepted by the King, was given after the House of Lords had introduced their amendments into the Parliament Bill. Previous communications had taken place of a confidential character between His Majesty and his advisers, as to which I may have something to say in the course of to-day.”

After this Mr. Balfour moved the following resolution :—

“That the advice given to His Majesty by His Majesty’s Ministers, whereby they obtained from His Majesty a pledge that a sufficient number of Peers would be created to pass the Parliament Bill in the shape in which it left this House, is a gross violation of constitutional liberty whereby among many other evil consequences the people would be precluded from again pronouncing upon the policy of Home Rule.”

Very strong language did Mr. Balfour use in moving his resolution, and was applauded warmly by both sections of his party.

“The Prime Minister,” he said, “extracted from the King a promise eight months before it was required to be fulfilled, which from that moment rendered impotent everything that could be done by one of the established Chambers in our constitution. Through all those eight months, the right honourable gentleman with these pledges in his pocket was masquerading as a constitutional Minister, when he had in fact, by the advice he had given

to the King, put himself far above the Constitution and used the prerogative as no Minister in this country has ever dared to use it before, and as no King in the old days of prerogative ever dared to use it."

Mr. Asquith, when he rose to make his defence, was received by the Conservatives in courteous silence, their demeanour being a marked contrast to that of a fortnight before, when they shouted him down. Lord Hugh Cecil, crouching in his corner seat, hung his head in the manner of one whose thoughts were in far-off things. As for Mr. Asquith, he was the picture of confidence: colour was in his cheeks, his expression was buoyant and full of vivacity. This is the defence he made:—

"The right honourable gentleman has complained that I have not given him, in support of what was apparently a hypothetical vote of censure, materials in advance by which he could or could not ascertain whether his hypotheses were well or ill founded. But the only point raised by the motion is whether in the circumstances in which we stand, with the Parliament Bill twice approved in principle, once approved in all its details, by the electors of the country, passed through this House by a continuous and overwhelming majority, and now met in the House of Lords by so-called amendments, which are in reality changes fundamental in their character and fatal to its purpose—whether it is, or is not the constitutional duty of the Ministers of the Crown to advise the Crown that, if the House of Lords refuses to give way, the prerogative of creation should be resorted to in order to carry into effect the will of the people.

"The right honourable gentleman has asked me when that advice was given. The answer is, as I have already

said in answer to his question, it was given in regard to the existing situation. It was given when a situation had arisen from which no other constitutional outlet was possible. It was given and accepted in reference to that situation, and it is by a review of that situation, how it arose and what it involved, that the question must be answered whether or not that advice was warranted and justified.

“That is a survey which I propose very shortly to undertake. But when I say that the advice as to the prerogative was tendered now and in view of existing circumstances, it must be clearly understood, as I have already intimated, that I do not mean in the least to convey that there had not been previous communications before the course of events had developed between the Sovereign and his Ministers on the subject. As it is most desirable that there should be no mystery or misunderstanding over a perfectly simple and correct transaction, it is, I am allowed to say, at His Majesty’s strong desire, therefore, of course, with his express permission, that I am able, as I am about to do, to disclose communications which up to this moment have been treated both by the King and by his Ministers as confidential. To make the matter clear, I must go back to the month of April, 1910, when the so-called Veto resolutions had been approved by large majorities in this House, and the Parliament Bill founded upon them had been introduced. King Edward VII. was then on the Throne—I ask the House to remember that—and there was every reason to believe that his life and his reign would be prolonged. It was notorious that our resolutions as carried in the House of Commons, and which were shortly to go before

the House of Lords, would be laid aside or rejected there, and the majority inside and outside this House were beginning to ask with not unnatural impatience whether the election just held was to be reduced to a nullity, and if matters were once more to result in a futile deadlock. It was in these circumstances that on April 14th, 1910, after careful consultation with my colleagues, in language approved by them and communicated to the King, who was abroad, I used these words to the House of Commons :

“ ‘ If the Lords fail to accept our policy or decline to consider it when it is formally presented to the House, we shall feel it our duty immediately to tender advice to the Crown as to the steps which will have to be taken if that policy is to receive statutory enactment in this Parliament. What the precise terms of that advice will be it will, of course, not be right for me to say now, but if we do not find ourselves in a position to ensure that statutory effect shall be given to that policy in this Parliament, we shall then either resign our offices, or recommend a dissolution of Parliament.’ ”

“ Now, here come the important words :—

“ ‘ Let me add this, that in no case will we recommend a dissolution except under such conditions as will secure that in the new Parliament the judgment of the people, as expressed at the elections, will be carried into law.’ ”

“ That is very plain language. It is language which represented, as I have said, the deliberate policy of the Government, and it was so understood and accepted at the time, not only by our friends but by our antagonists. It is a policy which, as I have reminded the House by reference to dates, was announced by me to the country

—that is the only observation which I shall make in reply to what I thought the very unhappy remarks of the right honourable gentleman in reference to a new King—as head of the Government while I was still King Edward's Minister. Within a month his reign came to a premature and a most unexpected end. A political truce followed, and for the best part of six months an honest, continuous, and, as I think, well-inspired endeavour was made by leading representatives of both parties in the State to arrive at a settlement by agreement. That experiment, unhappily, as I shall always think; though I impute no blame to any one, finally broke down in the early part of November, and we then reverted to the situation as it stood in April. What was the first question which we, the Ministers of the Crown, had then to determine? It was whether we should go on in the then existing Parliament, or whether we should advise a dissolution, having regard in both cases to my declarations of the preceding April. In the circumstances, after very full consideration, we thought it right to advise a dissolution of Parliament. Nearly a year had passed since the general election. We were in a new reign. There had been much discussion, some of it not of an acrimonious kind, of the questions at issue. Moreover, our plan was now actually formulated in the shape of a bill. On the whole, it appeared to us, and I think so still, that the arguments for dissolution were overwhelmingly strong. But we were clear, at the same time, that it would be neither honourable nor justifiable to go into another election blindfolded. In the first place there was my deliberate pledge, given upon the floor of this House in the name of my colleagues and the Government—that which

I read a moment ago—that in no case would we recommend a dissolution, except under such conditions as would secure in the new Parliament that the judgment of the people would be carried into law. A great many hard words have been used about me just now. I do not mind in the least. Harder words would have been used—words which I would have minded, if after that declaration of the Government given by my colleagues and I, we had been false to the trust reposed in us by thousands and millions in the country. We have been accused of breaches of trust by orators and Pressmen of the party opposite—of treachery and trickery. I might have been accused, with reason, both of treachery and of trickery had we done that. But, secondly, quite apart from that distinct and deliberate pledge, we might have been so accused if we had thought it right to plunge the country a second time in the course of a single year into the cost, the turmoil and confusion of a general election, unless we could have felt sure that if it gave a decisive result it—subject, of course, to full Parliamentary discussion—would be regarded as applying to a definite proposal. When we resolved to advise the King to dissolve Parliament we accompanied our advice, on November 15th, 1910, with this statement :—

“ ‘ His Majesty’s Ministers cannot take the responsibility of advising a dissolution unless they may understand that, in the event of the policy of the Government being approved by an adequate majority in the new House of Commons, His Majesty will be ready to exercise his constitutional powers, which may involve the prerogative of creating Peers, if needed, to secure that effect shall be given to the decision of the country. His Majesty’s

Ministers are fully alive to the importance of keeping the name of the King out of the sphere of party and electoral controversy. They take upon themselves, as is their duty, the entire and exclusive responsibility for the policy which they will place before the electorate. His Majesty will doubtless agree it would be inadvisable in the interests of the State, that any communication of the intention of the Crown should be made public unless and until the actual occasion should arise.'

"That was the communication made by the Cabinet on November 15th. His Majesty—after careful consideration of the circumstances, past and present, and after discussing the matter in all its bearings with myself, and with my noble friend and colleague, Lord Crewe—felt he had no alternative but to assent to the advice of the Cabinet. Accordingly on November 18th, 1910, two days later, I announced to this House :—

" ' We have advised the King, and he has accepted our advice, to dissolve Parliament.'

"In the course of that debate, in answer to a question put by my honourable friend the Member for Newcastle-under-Lyme, I used this language :—

" ' My honourable friend has asked me a question in regard to the declaration which I made on April 14th.'

"That declaration I have already mentioned to the House.

" ' That declaration, the language of which was carefully chosen, represents now, as it did then, the intention of His Majesty's Government. I may say, and I am quite sure that honourable members on both sides of this House will recognise the justice and, I hope, the common sense

of my position, when I decline altogether and shall continue to decline, to make any statement as to the advice I may have given, or may hereafter give as a responsible Minister, to the Crown. The King stands aloof from all our political and electoral conflicts, and it is the duty of all his subjects and of his Ministers to maintain and secure his absolute detachment from the arena of party politics. I hope my honourable friends have sufficient confidence—I will not say in myself, but in His Majesty's Government—to be content with that statement.'

"We might have resigned. If we had resigned, the King, no doubt, would have sent for the right honourable gentleman opposite, the leader of the Opposition. He might, or he might not, have taken the responsibility of forming a Government. If he had, it is a matter of common knowledge that the Government so formed could not have existed for a week in this House, for the simple reason that the House would have refused to grant supply. A dissolution was inevitable.

"I ask the particular attention of the House and the country to this. A dissolution under these conditions would have been held in circumstances which would have made it impossible to keep the name and authority of the King out of the arena of party politics. His Majesty, no doubt, thought this was a matter which was peculiarly incumbent upon him to safeguard. I have never used in public or in private the word "guarantee" or "pledge" in regard to this matter. They are words which seem to me singularly inappropriate to describe a conditional understanding such as this, which we purposely left open because of certain contingencies which might arise. Amongst others, was the majority in the new House of

Commons, and the shape the Bill would assume in the Parliamentary discussion. Nothing can be more absurd than to suggest (I do not think the right honourable gentleman suggested it in the course of his speech, but I certainly know it is alleged outside) that the existence of such a confidential understanding between the Sovereign and his Ministers introduced any element of unreality in the subsequent discussion of the Bill when it came before both Houses. I will tell you why. There was never any question of obtaining the royal assent in advance to a cast-iron legislative scheme to be rammed through Parliament. His Majesty's assent would never have been asked, and I am certain would never have been granted to any such proposals. The Bill has always been treated by us and is treated now, as we shall show to-morrow, as a Bill approved in principle by the electorate of this country and therefore to be carried in principle into law, susceptible to any reasonable amendment not fatal to that principle. It was only to the contingency of its possible rejection or its mutilation by the other House—which has taken place—after it had received at the polls the approval of a decisive majority, and after it had gone through the full ordeal of Parliamentary discussion, that the understanding was ever intended to apply. Indeed, it was my hope and strong belief, expressed at this Table I think on the first night of the present session, that the House of Lords, when it got possession of the Bill, would show by its treatment of it that it recognised and was prepared, without pressure or suggestion of pressure, to give substantial effect to the decisive wishes of the electorate. It was only when that hope was frustrated, as it was in the course of last month, that His Majesty was asked and consented,

if necessary, to exercise his prerogative. That is the whole proceeding, calling, in my judgment, for no words of apology or even of defence. We took the only course which was consistent with considerations of honour and with a true regard to the dignity of the Crown. The course we took was correct, it was considerate, it was constitutional. For my part, speaking for myself and for my colleagues in the Cabinet, I am perfectly content to abide in regard to it by the judgment, first of this House, and then of my fellow-countrymen."

Asquith's
speech
Commons

After reviewing the circumstances of 1832, Mr. Asquith continued—

"Next, let the House contrast the two cases. We are dealing here with a Bill which has been twice before the electors, in all its main principles in January, and in all its details in December. We are dealing with a Bill the principle of which has been three times confirmed in two successive Houses of Commons. We are dealing with a Bill in regard to which we have not asked for the exercise of the royal prerogative until it had gone through all its stages in the House of Lords. In Lord Grey's case there had been one election and one election only. He demanded the exercise of the prerogative before the Bill had even been into committee in the Upper House. I make the right honourable gentleman a present of any benefit he can get out of the analogy.

"The truth is, this is a far stronger case in every one of its details. You may say, and you are entitled to say, that the country approved the Bill, but has the House of Lords gone beyond the legitimate sphere of amendment and re-construction within the limits of the principle which the country so approved? I had the answer to

that question a few moments ago from the other part of the House. Let us see what the Bill is now. Is it the Bill which the country approved? Does it bear any but the most superficial resemblance to that Bill? I see that some learned commentators have made out that there are some fifty to seventy lines in the Bill as it came back from the House of Lords which are identical with the Bill as it left the House of Commons, but it has had grafted upon it, in the Lansdowne amendment, the very alternative which the country repudiated. And here comes in another vital point differentiating this case from the Reform Bill of 1832 and differentiating it in favour of the constitutional course pursued by the Government. In 1832 it was a question of the Bill, and nothing but the Bill; but, as everybody knows, in December, 1910, that was not the case. There was the Bill on the one hand, and the Lansdowne scheme on the other, the Referendum, and all the rest of it; and I may add, as the right honourable gentleman has chosen to introduce the topic, Home Rule. On your side, I will undertake to say, there was not a single speech made by a single right honourable gentleman on that Bench in the course of the general election of 1910 in which the country was not warned. Everybody knows that was the bogey set up. Right honourable gentlemen opposite tried to buy votes for the Referendum by representing that the effect of the Parliament Bill, if carried, would be to carry Home Rule. So that we are here dealing with a much stronger case—I am dealing only with the constitutional case for the exercise of the prerogative—than ever existed in 1832; for not only has our Bill been twice before the country, but the alternative scheme of the House of Lords

has been also before the country, and has been as decisively rejected.

“ Now, Sir, I ask this simple question. What in these conditions—and this is a purely constitutional point—what in these conditions according to the law and practice of the British Constitution, if the House of Lords will not give way, what outlet, what way of escape, is there open to us ? I put that question to right honourable gentlemen opposite now. I challenge any right honourable gentleman opposite to rise in his place and tell me what is the constitutional solution of the situation. As for the authorities, they are absolutely unanimous. I will quote only one, but one of very great eminence—Professor Dicey. He says in his classic work on the subject—‘ The point at which the Lords must yield or the Crown must intervene is properly determined by anything which conclusively shows that the House of Commons represents in the matter in dispute the deliberate decision of the nation.’

“ Is that going to be questioned ? I will state in a sentence why the facts are indisputable. Every one knows that at this moment no alternative Government is possible. By an alternative Government I mean a Government to which the House of Commons would give its confidence. Everybody also knows—and I should be very much surprised if any one denies what I am going to say—that no responsible Minister who could be called to the counsels of the Sovereign would venture at this moment to put the country to the gratuitous turmoil, cost, and confusion of a third general election in the course of two years, which no one believes would or could give a substantially different result. There is no use

blinking the facts. These are the real facts of the situation. These are the facts with which we are face to face. It is the situation contemplated by all our great text-writers and authorities on the Constitution as justifying what is admitted to be a wholly exceptional use of the prerogative. If we want precedent of the practice, we can go back to the much weaker case of 1832. I will once more cite a classical passage on the subject, the language which was then used by Lord Grey. Lord Grey said in the House of Lords: 'I ask what would be the consequence if we were to suppose that such a prerogative did not exist, or could not be constitutionally exercised? The Commons have a control over the power of the Crown by the privilege, in extreme cases, of refusing supply. The Crown has, by means of its power to dissolve the House of Commons, a control upon any violent and rash proceedings on the part of the Commons. If a majority of this House'—that is the House of Lords—'is to have the power whenever they please of opposing the declared and decided wishes both of the Crown and the people without any means of modifying that power, then this country is placed entirely under the influence of an uncontrollable oligarchy.' That is the true constitutional doctrine. There is nothing of novelty in its being applied to-day in the same way in the case of extreme and overwhelming necessity. I am accustomed, as Lord Grey in his day was accustomed, to be accused of breach of the constitution and even of treachery to the Crown. I confess, as I have said before, that I am not in the least sensitive to this cheap and ill-informed form of vituperation. It has been my privilege, almost now I think unique, to serve in close and confidential relations, three successive

British Sovereigns. My conscience tells me that in that capacity, many and great as have been my failures and shortcomings, I have consistently striven to uphold the dignity and just privileges of the Crown. But I hold my office not only by favour of the Crown but by the confidence of the people, and I should be guilty indeed of treason if in this supreme moment of a great struggle I were to betray their trust."

Winding up the debate for the Government later on in the evening, Mr. Churchill gleefully told the Opposition that they were miscalculating, if they were reckoning on a small creation of Peers. "Why should we shrink from the creation of 400 or 500 Peers? At any rate, it is one way of arriving at an impartial Second Chamber, evenly balanced, in which Liberals will have as good a chance as the Opposition. At any rate, it is one way of putting the House of Lords in touch with the real balance of forces, of classes and of parties; although no doubt an assembly of 1200 might prove unwieldy, it might form a convenient panel from which a smaller body might be constituted for actual business."

In the end the vote of censure was defeated by 365 votes to 246.

Next day, in the House of Lords, a similar vote of censure was moved by Lord Curzon, and this gave opportunity for Lord Crewe's version of what took place between the Government and the King. Lord Crewe, it must be remembered, was the leader of the House of Lords, and he, with Mr. Asquith, was necessarily in close consultation with His Majesty when constitutional matters were under discussion between Court and Cabinet. The following passages from Lord Crewe's speech show

that King George was reluctant to resort to a creation of Peers if such a course of action could be avoided, but that he eventually came to the conclusion that the advice of his Ministers must be followed.

“ I have His Majesty’s leave,” said Lord Crewe, “ to state exactly what occurred, because, since this question of that interview has been made the subject of so much comment, the King naturally desires that the facts should be plainly stated. The effect of that interview was that we ascertained his Majesty’s view that, if the opinion of the country were clearly ascertained upon the Parliament Bill, in the last resort a creation of Peers might be the only remedy and might be the only way of concluding the dispute. His Majesty faced the contingency and entertained the suggestion as a possible one with natural, and if I may be permitted to use the phrase, in my opinion, with legitimate reluctance. His Majesty, however, naturally entertained the feeling—a feeling which we entirely shared—that if we resigned our offices, having, as we had, a large majority in the House of Commons, the only result could be an immediate dissolution, in which it would practically be impossible, however anxious we should be, to keep the Crown out of the controversy. The mixing up of the Crown in a controversy such as that was naturally most distasteful to its illustrious wearer, whom we may regard as the first guardian of its prestige, but it could be scarcely more distasteful even to His Majesty than to myself and my colleagues, for reasons which I need not, I am sure, dilate upon. But it is altogether inaccurate—and I might use a stronger phrase—to say that at that time we asked His Majesty for ‘ guarantees.’ The question whether at any time the advice to

create Peers should be given must necessarily depend for one thing upon the adequacy of the majority with which we were returned to the House of Commons, assuming that we were returned at all. The noble marquess, leader of the Opposition, on November 18 last used these words: 'If the Government secure a majority of half a dozen votes the Bill is to be imposed upon a muzzled and helpless House of Lords.' That contingency has not arisen, and it is not for me to say whether, if it had arisen, we should have been in a position to give to the Crown the advice which we tendered last month.

“Another question affecting the advice given to the Crown would be the magnitude of the difference between the two Houses. I do not know whether the magnitude of the difference between the two Houses in this case is disputed. The noble earl seemed disposed to dispute it and to argue that, after all, the amendments which noble lords opposite proposed were all of them so comparatively innocuous in character that it would be easy for us to come to an agreement upon them, and the fact that it was so easy made the possibility of this last resort being used so monstrous on this occasion. I can only say that to me, although I have not been able to follow the discussions on the Bill, the main amendments proposed by the noble marquess opposite practically mean an altogether new Bill. When the noble earl says that the House accepted the principle by passing the second reading I am altogether unable to follow him, or, indeed, to understand what he means. Nor are matters made very much better by the statement that the proposals of the noble marquess, according to the noble earl, are neither your policy nor ours. They are apparently something which

satisfies nobody, and how a basis of agreement is to be made out of a proposition which apparently is liked as little by its authors as by us I am altogether unable to understand. Speaking not altogether without experience of being in a difficult position in this House, I say quite categorically that I would infinitely sooner continue for the rest of my life to lead the House or to be a member of the House under the conditions in which I have sat here hitherto than I would attempt to perform the same duty or be in the same position under the Bill as amended by the noble marquess opposite. I hope I have made that clear, because the noble earl pressed strongly upon that point, and seemed to consider that our attack was of such an infamous kind because we were throwing away the chance of something like harmonious agreement. ✓

“Turning for one moment to the conversation which we had with the King, I confess that the contention that that conversation gave any unreality either to the election or to the subsequent discussion of the Bill seems to me an entirely empty one. When the noble earl complains that we said nothing of that conversation, I wonder what the noble earl would have said—and I think would have said with perfect justice—if we had attempted to use that conversation as a lever in the general election of last December for the purpose of securing votes. As a matter of fact, so far as I know, that conversation was never mentioned in the election, and I am glad it was not, because the conversation was of an informal character, and of the nature—I will not say of a private conversation; but not of a nature which ought properly to have been made public at the time. Therefore, I confess that I am

absolutely unrepentant as to the alleged irregularity of which, according to the noble earl, we have been guilty. I cannot help saying, Who is the worse for it? What possible harm was done or, indeed, could have been done? The sole object, and indeed the sole effect, of the conversation was to authorise the Government in asking for a dissolution of Parliament. On that I say that I do not feel that any other course would have been possible. The noble earl questioned us about our possible resignation and the taking of office by his right honourable friend Mr. Balfour. I think I have already answered that in stating His Majesty's views on this subject—views which I venture respectfully to say I entirely share. The resignation by us of our offices could only have meant an immediate dissolution, and it would not have been possible, and I do not believe noble lords opposite can say that it would have been possible, to avoid giving some explanation which must have led to a controversy into which the Crown might and probably would have been brought. The accusation is that our action in presenting the views of the Cabinet to His Majesty last November was premature. The only answer to that is that it was not action at all. It was a conversation dealing with a purely hypothetical set of conditions . . .

“I have endeavoured to describe the steps by which we arrived at the advice which last month was given to the Crown. That advice involves what in our opinion is the last resort, the final resort in the absence of an appeal to the country, and a further appeal to the country has not yet, so far as I am aware, been asked for by anybody. I have not seen it asked for by any of the newspapers which support noble Lords opposite, and it is not

asked for because it is known that it would not be a reasonable thing to put the country to the trouble of another general election once more confined to this particular issue. I can only say that his Majesty's Government look forward with profound reluctance to the use of that last resort ; but there is no alternative. There can be no alternative but to face that last resort and adhere to the advice given to the Crown. I do not pretend that, as a party, we are all of one mind on this question of the creation of Peers. We there resemble the party of noble Lords opposite, some of whom seemed to look forward with positive enjoyment to the idea of a forced creation. Most of us think that if this House is to be reformed that reform should be more soberly considered than by the immediate addition of a large number to its body, even though the effect of such an addition might be to redress in a larger or less degree the balance of parties in the House ; at the same time it is desirable to attempt to remove the misapprehension which may exist in some minds. The noble earl alluded to the bold figures mentioned by the Home Secretary in another place yesterday ; but this I do feel myself, that if we are to be forced into giving advice which may have the effect of the creation of Peers we cannot pretend that the number to be so created should necessarily be limited by any newspaper list, of which there have been so many seen of late ; nor would it necessarily have any reference whatever to the list of your Lordships' House which may be seen when the question of the amendments once more comes before the House. All such lists will have become, if the lamentable necessity arises, altogether irrelevant, and all the various combinations of noble lords opposite of which we read

in our morning newspapers must be assumed to be at an end, because they have reference to an entirely different state of things. My Lords, I say this not, as I venture to claim, in any minatory spirit, because the whole business, I frankly admit, is odious to me. I can only assure your Lordships that anybody who tells you a different story has either been misled as to the facts of the case or has a purpose to serve in making the statement."

While the Lords were listening to Lord Crewe's story, the Commons were dealing with Lord Lansdowne's amendment. Mr. Asquith was away with a touch of laryngitis, and the proceedings were in charge of Mr. Lloyd George and Mr. Churchill. Lord Hugh Cecil—a chastened man in comparison with himself a fortnight before—moved to postpone consideration of the amendments for three months with the avowed purpose of destroying the Bill. Comparatively calm at first, he worked himself up to considerable heat, but although he was now and again interrupted, there was nothing like systematic disorder. It is a point worthy of note that he was quite unrepentant for having caused the Prime Minister to be shouted down. "You thought that disorder in the House of Commons was an empty threat," he said; "I say that I look back on the event of fourteen days ago with satisfaction." Sir Edward Carson seconded Lord Hugh Cecil's motion, and in the course of his speech roused angry protests by speaking of the communication made by the Prime Minister announcing the royal consent to the creation of Peers as a "blackmailing letter." The tact of the Speaker smoothed down the outburst. Later Mr. Churchill stated the intention of

the Government with regard to the Lords' amendments. In brief it was proposed to disagree with all the vital amendments made by the Peers, and to accept the few alterations which did not affect the principle of the Bill. The Speaker was to be re-established as sole arbiter as to what was or was not a money bill, but it was agreed that two responsible members of the House of Commons might be taken into consultation by him. That was the principal modification. Subsequently it was explained by Mr. Lloyd George that the proposal arose from the wish of the present Speaker, Mr. Lowther, to have some one associated with him for consultative purposes. It was agreed after discussion that the Speaker before giving his certificate on a money bill, should consult "If practicable two members to be appointed from the Speaker's panel at the beginning of each session by the committee of selection." Apart from this alteration in the Bill, the Government accepted amendments which prevented the machinery of the Parliament Bill being used to extend the duration of Parliament beyond five years, which altered the enacting words in measures passed without the consent of the Lords, and which excluded from the scope of the Bill provisional order legislation.

One of the interesting features of the debate was the announcement of Mr. Balfour with reference to the future policy of the Conservatives on the House of Lords. It was drawn from him by an interrogatory from Mr. Churchill as to whether the Conservatives would repeal the Parliament Bill. "The policy of the party to which I belong," said Mr. Balfour, "is that the House of Lords should be reformed, and that with that reform, coincident with it,

and contemporaneous with it, there should be a re-adjustment between the reformed House of Lords and this House, so that some better method of dealing with deadlocks should be devised. If he calls that repeal, I am in favour of it, but I am not in favour, and so far as I am aware, none of my friends are, of the mere repeal of this Bill, without substituting any reformed system."

CHAPTER XXI

HOW THE LORDS ASSENTED

IF the giants of 1831 could have been brought back to witness the final scenes in the House of Lords over the Parliament Bill, they would have been shocked and bewildered at the changes in thought among all parties, but almost against their will they would have felt a touch of exhilaration in the resuscitation of the old-time strenuousness and reality. Their depression at altered modes of view would have been lightened by the knowledge that the Lords could still fight in the grand manner. Could Lord Brougham and Lord Lyndhurst but have stood on the steps of the Throne on the night of August 10th, they would have had momentary thrills of days gone by—though for long periods the democratic vein in the discussion might have set both Whig and Tory wondering. To look upon a House of Lords which was practically agreed that legislative privileges by virtue of heredity alone should cease, to hear Ministers of the day declaring that the Lords must be stripped of their ancient legislative powers, these were experiences which might well have chilled the heart of even the most progressive statesman of William IV. Strange and fantastic would have seemed the notions of the modern

House of Lords ; and if Lord Grey, the Whig Prime Minister, had been standing side by side with his old opponent, the Duke of Wellington, in the gallery, he would have been the first to agree it was a mad world that had succeeded. As for the duke—who had vigorously defended the old rotten borough system—one can only imagine his mind as in a state of chaos at the sight of the transformation of that reformed constitution which in itself was to him a danger if not an actual disaster. One element alone in 1911 would have appealed to him—the bigness of the occasion. 50 or 60 new peers was what the Duke had been threatened with ; his successor was being faced with a prospective 400 or 500 ; but if the extent of the possibility had stirred the Duke's heart, the general portents would have appalled him. Sorrowfully might the great commander and statesman have acknowledged that there is no finality in life, and quoted to himself Matthew Arnold's lines :—

“The world in which we live and move
Outlasts aversion, outlasts love,
Outlasts each effort, interest, hope,
Remorse, grief, joy ; and were the scope
Of these affections wider made,
Man still would see, and see dismayed
Beyond his passion's widest range
Far regions of eternal change.”

And yet, withal, there were not lacking some resemblances to that time when the Ministry had used the monarch to coerce the House. Again a stalwart band denounced change as damnable, again there were heroic defenders of privilege, who called the gods to witness that the destruction of the British Constitution was to hand, and that the cardinal virtues were to suffer outrage.

Some trace of old passions still lingered. The unreason of educated people is always more dangerous than the unreason of the ignorant, and some of the more violent of the Halsbury followers would have made trouble for the State if they had possessed sway. Nevertheless, they were moved by peculiarly British prejudices, stiffened by peculiarly British qualities, and from some points of view (if one is not a politician) their course was admirable and pulse-moving.

~~No man on the morning~~ of August 9th could tell what was to be the outcome of the meeting of the Lords to commence that day and finish the next. The Lords were in front of their final choice—they had either to accept the Bill as the Government had framed it, or by their opposition to cause the Government to create several hundreds of new Peers to outvote them. And with this dilemma directly ahead, strange was it that no politician could tell how the decision would go. Usually, before big political occasions, however exciting they may promise to be, the ultimate result is pretty well known before the discussion is entered upon—a majority for one side or the other, a climb-down by a defeated party, a moderate use of success by the victors, a stinging announcement by leaders. Often this foreknowledge detracts from reality, lessens interest and in extreme cases gives colour to the suggestion that party politics are a game. “It is all arranged beforehand,” say the hasty cynics and the uninformed; and they claim that the human interest lies not in either House of Parliament, but in Cabinet conclaves, private conferences of individuals, intrigues in the rooms of party chiefs. On this occasion there could be no such suggestions, for the stark reality of the situation

was one of its features. Parties and sections of parties were fighting each other in the open, with a fury and intensity which all the world might see, and with motives displayed for the view of Heaven. Under-currents there may have been, but they were all tributary to the main torrent. The straightness of the fight, the directness of the issues, set the contest above all Parliamentary contests of recent times. There were three main sets of combatants; the Government, who were determined on the passage of the Parliament Bill to sweep away the opposition of the Lords to Liberal legislation; the majority of the Conservatives, who, hating the Parliament Bill, were now, perforce, willing to accept it in order to prevent the flooding of the Upper Chamber with new Liberal Peers; and thirdly, the recalcitrant Conservative minority, who would give in to the Government on no terms, who challenged them to create their Peers, and almost ferociously announced their intention of forcing the creation. The majority of the Conservative Peers, following Lord Lansdowne, were to abstain from voting, and this left open a way for the revolting Conservatives to vote down the Government forces. In numbers the contending groups were believed to be about evenly matched, there being, it was supposed, about eighty on each side. Both the Government and the "No surrender" group made strong efforts to call up every possible supporter, and as there was a floating body of opinion in the House among the Bishops and among the independent moderate Conservatives, much scope for missionary effort was afforded. Lord Halsbury and his two young lieutenants, Lord Willoughby de Broke and Mr. F. E. Smith, worked unremittingly to get together a

force sufficient to bring about sensational Government action. Lord Lansdowne and his supporters were naturally perturbed, and declining from principle to vote for the Bill and afraid to vote against it because of the prospective new Peers, poured a volume of mingled entreaty and denunciation upon the Stalwarts. The latter answered in a kind of joyous defiance. So far as it can be summarised, that is the position of affairs when the House of Lords met on Wednesday, August 9th, to take into consideration the remodelled Bill which had come back from the Commons. Aug 9

A really eloquent appeal was made by Lord Lansdowne; a speech of truculent non-compliance was forthcoming from Lord Halsbury, and words of fervour on both sides followed until the House adjourned. The debate was to be continued and finished on the following day; and the very last phase of the great struggle was to be the division on the question as to whether or not Lord Lansdowne's vital amendment to the Parliament Bill was to be insisted on. The final debate began at half-past four on the Thursday afternoon, and it was generally expected that the end would be reached about eight o'clock. The House of Commons was discussing a resolution for the payment of members, but scores of M.P.'s, forgetting any interest in their material welfare, had left their own House, and were crowded into allotted corners of the Lords. Lines of Peeresses, waving fans to mitigate the heat, looked down from the narrow galleries. Cabinet Ministers from the Commons and other Privy Councillors on the steps of the Throne had placid faces, which were not in accord with their nervous movements, as they threaded to and fro. Outside the chamber in the main

corridor, Peers and Peeresses, Members of Parliament, and visitors from outside, were in groups talking vivaciously, and weighing the chances one way or the other. Through the throng, Mr. F. E. Smith, with reflectiveness on his boyish face and a red flower in his buttonhole, went backwards and forwards quietly talking to the Peers; helping on the work of organisation. His colleague, Lord Willoughby de Broke—tall, clean-shaven, with a certain breezy audacity in his expression and a mingled air of vigour and recklessness—had reached Westminster at three o'clock, the time at which I saw him passing through St. Stephen's Hall on his way to the Lords lobby, and had been very busy since. It was a great day for him. He was bent on achieving victory, and before him lay the task of argument and persuasion among those Peers who were yet undecided. Well did he perform his self-appointed work. When, at half-past four, the discussion began, there was in the Chamber a substantial majority of Stalwarts over and above the Government and their supporters. No one but the organisers knew it, but within an hour the knowledge had spread, and even during the speech of Lord Midleton, a Lansdowne peer, who had opened the day's debate, the news went round the House; reached the lobby, even percolated to the House of Commons, that the Stalwarts were on top. There was exultation on the face of Lord Willoughby as he sat at the corner of one of the Conservative benches in the intervals of excursions among the crowds in the corridors. Prim, erect, courageous, sat Lord Lansdowne, showing no sign of dismay at the overthrow of his counsels; by his side was the square old Lord Halsbury, his silk hat tilted over his eyes, his arms folded across his breast.

Eighty-six was he, but the fires of youth burnt strongly within him. Opposite sat Lord Morley, pallid and stern, burdened by the realisation of what the victory of the Stalwarts would mean—the creation on the morrow of overwhelming Peers, and the entire alteration of the world-famous House of Lords. Near him was Lord Haldane, usually so imperturbable, but now with anxiety showing in his face, and a wisp of his hair disarranged and descending irregularly on his forehead.

Over all the gathering there was the faintest murmur of emotion, telling of restrained feeling, hard determination, tremulous expectancy. The knowledge that the Stalwarts had the upper hand was particularly horrid to the Lansdowne Conservatives, for they realised that the desperadoes could now bring about the immediate destruction of their order, and that they had only to file into the division lobby to achieve the creation (probably on the morrow) of the new Peers. At one stroke the prestige and exclusiveness of the House would be destroyed. I have never seen so much real feeling displayed in the House of Lords. In their anxiety the moderate men made appeals to Lord Morley to assure the rebels that the Government were in earnest, and that they meant to create not merely just enough Peers to overcome Lord Halsbury, but enough to swamp the entire Conservative army. After a few seconds' hesitation, Lord Morley rose to respond to the appeal—for which he was apparently prepared. He took a sheet of paper from his pocket and read out these carefully chosen words :—

“ I am glad to take this opportunity of replying to the question put to me by the noble Marquess

(Lord Lansdowne). It is a question that deserves and requires an answer that is plain, deliberate, and beyond all cavil or mistake. If the Bill should be defeated to-night, His Majesty would assent to a creation of Peers sufficient in number to guard against any possible combination of the different parties in opposition by which the Parliament Bill might again be exposed a second time to defeat."

To this written statement, Lord Morley added the words :—

" All I have got to say on this part of the matter is that every vote given to-night against my motion not to insist upon what is called Lord Lansdowne's amendment, is a vote given in favour of a large and prompt creation of Peers."

There could be no doubt as to the immediate effect of this declaration. It scared a good many, and the Stalwarts felt it like a blow in the face. The debate went on as before, and yet one was conscious of a subtle difference among that little army of irreconcilables who sat behind Lord Lansdowne, a quieter spirit, a lessening of confidence, a growing fear. Perhaps a few undeclared Peers, inclining to the Stalwarts may have made up their minds to abstain—I think it probable that that is so. Undoubtedly some of the moderate Conservatives decided to throw in their lot with the Government ; and, at any rate for a time, the rising hope and joy among the Stalwarts was checked. And then, strangely enough, before two hours were gone, the atmosphere had changed again, and once more the hearts of the Stalwarts were swelling with the thoughts of victory. Lord Camperdown, a staunch Conservative, declared that, hating the Bill as

he did, he intended to vote for it. This enraged the Duke of Norfolk, who had previously been one of Lord Lansdowne's adherents, and he broke loose with the announcement that he should vote with the Stalwarts. Lord Halifax followed the Duke of Norfolk's lead. From that time onward until the final moment, when the figures were announced by the Lord Chancellor, the House was in throes. The new movement against the Government started by the Duke of Norfolk and Lord Halifax, seemed to grow in strength as the minutes went on, and the general feeling was apparent to any one who watched proceedings from the gallery or who took an occasional walk through the lobbies. Apart from the announcement of the Duke of Norfolk, it is possible that Lord Willoughby and the other leaders had been quietly notified that a good many of the undeclared men who had come up to vote that afternoon, were on their side, and this knowledge spreading, may have led to the concluding exciting passages. The very air of the crowded House of Lords was full of strange messages that evening, and only the most obtuse of politicians could fail to read them; and without being adequately able to explain the reason, practically every Lord and Lady, every person on the steps of the Throne, and every person in the strangers' gallery, knew at eight o'clock that the stream was running strongly in favour of the Stalwarts and against Lord Lansdowne. The latter sat exactly facing Lord Morley. The faces of both were fixed and hard. Strong opponents, they were for once moved by almost the same emotion, oppressed by the same fear. Each saw only too clearly the extraordinary and lamentable effect of victory for Lord Halsbury.

The usual adjournment for dinner was ignored—even when it became apparent that in the stress and storm of feeling the discussion must continue late. Every time a speech was finished, two or three Peers jumped up to continue. For once in a way it was possible that votes might be influenced by speeches, and while the Lansdowne men were desperately eager to secure other abstentions, or even votes for the Government, the followers of Lord Halsbury were equally anxious to obtain those extra two or three votes which might, in a tight finish, turn defeat into victory. Besides, the political passions of the Lords were really roused ; no one talked for the sake of talking ; and forcefulness, persuasion, deep beliefs, were in the words of all. Add to this the fact that even by half-past eight no one on either side could say with any certainty the result of the division, and you will see that the situation was almost one of melodrama. A few sporting bets were made in the lobbies between eight and nine, and the odds at that time were 6 to 4 on the Stalwarts.

At a quarter to nine, after a long general discussion, a formal motion that “ The Commons’ reasons for disagreeing with the Lords’ amendments be now considered,” was agreed to, and the Lords proceeded to continue the debate in respect of the particular alterations proposed by the Commons. Some of the lesser changes were acquiesced in, and then came Lord Lansdowne’s amendment, shutting out Home Rule and other big issues from the operation of the Bill. On this must come the fatal division, but before the division was called there were some more hot speeches—speeches on the general question, and in reality, a continuation of the debate

of the night. The fact that an actual amendment was under review was merely a technicality.

Many members were still anxious to speak; and by half-past nine the House was in a ferment of excitement. It was now as certain as any political prospect can be certain, that the Stalwarts would be successful. Lord Willoughby's usually pale face was pink with joy as he flitted to and from the lobbies; Lord Morley was haggard from the strain; and precise and rigid and stern was Lord Lansdowne. The Earl of Plymouth, amid loud cheers from the Stalwarts, now said he should vote against the Government. It became evident that strong measures would have to be forthcoming, if there was to be any chance of saving to-morrow's sensation of the creation of Peers. Several excited members rose at the end of Lord Plymouth's speech, the Archbishop of Canterbury among them, and it was the Primate's penetrating voice that got in the first word. He was a man whose sympathy was always on the side of the Conservatives, but he was genuinely frightened now. The callousness and the levity of the Stalwarts, he said, had caused him to alter his mind about abstaining from the division, and he should vote with the Government. Halsbury Peers leapt to their feet, defiant and argumentative. One of them was Lord St. Levan, who was given priority by his colleagues. He found he could not speak because Lord Heneage, a moderate Conservative, was also standing up, and would not give way. A strange scene followed. In the House of Lords, the Lord Chancellor is not allowed to choose between those who desire to address the House, and, as a rule, noble Lords, by exercising a mutual courtesy, do not clash; if two of them rise together, one

of them sits down again. But this night was no common occasion. Tempers were up ; and striking words one way or the other might make all the difference. Lord St. Levan and Lord Heneage both remained on their feet, each determined not to give way to the other, and they were encouraged by the shouts of the rival sections which they represented. For a minute there was much confusion. Lord Halsbury soon made it clear that he intended his champion to have a chance, and stepping to the Table, hat in hand, he moved : " That Lord St. Levan be heard." Amid much excitement, the Lord Chancellor put the question, and declared the motion carried. Lord Heneage got his chance after Lord St. Levan, and he promptly announced that he was going to vote with the Government.

At this point word was brought up to the galleries that calculations made it appear the Government would be defeated by a majority of three votes. Everybody was on the strain, and Ministers in front of the Throne, it was apparent, were discussing matters with much animation with some of their political opponents. The chief Whips of the Parties, Lord Balcarres and the Master of Elibank respectively, were hurrying in and out every other minute. Despite the great heat of the night, most of the Peeresses in the gallery had ceased to use their fans, and many of them were leaning forward to hear every word. One young girl in white evening dress had dropped to her knees in her eagerness, and had her head thrust over the rail, to lose no part of the great scene. On the result of the division now imminent, hung many things—among them the leadership of Mr. Balfour and Lord Lansdowne. Let the Stalwarts win, and there

would be not only the immediate creation of something over 500 Peers, but, in addition, the resignation of the two Conservative chiefs. The knowledge that the sudden irruption of 500 Peers would be a permanent feature in our country's story for centuries to come, and the knowledge that the King as a constitutional monarch must inevitably be inclined against the making of the new Peers, strung tight the nerves of every person in that memorable assembly.

When Lord Heneage sat down about ten o'clock, there was a sudden hush, and the Lord Chancellor rose to put the question. Lord Curzon was, however, watching his chance to get in the last word, and when it seemed by the rising of the Lord Chancellor that no one else intended to speak, he sprang up to make the final appeal. Lord Loreburn sank to the Woolsack again; and Lord Curzon made the speech which it was apparent he hoped would turn the scale. He pleaded with the Stalwarts, and then lectured them with all his well-known superiority of manner—with the result that they shouted indignantly at him. Once he was interrupted by an angry reminder from the Marquess of Bristol, a clean-shaven Peer who has been in the Navy, that Lord Lansdowne's followers to the number of 400, were going to run away. "I would sooner run away with the Duke of Wellington than fight with the noble Lord," returned Lord Curzon, in dignified rebuke. "And I," shouted the Marquess of Bristol, "would sooner fight with Nelson at Copenhagen than run away with the noble Lord." The Stalwarts cheered ringingly. I do not think Lord Curzon's speech did his cause much good, and if he thought he was to have the last word, he was mistaken; Lord Halsbury saw to

that. Rising immediately Lord Curzon took his seat; he said: "I cannot allow the oration to which we have just listened to remain without an answer." He answered it in his characteristically robustious way. When he had finished the House was again on the brink of its great decision. The Lord Chancellor half rose from his place, then resumed it as he saw Lord Rosebery quietly striding to the Table from the cross benches. The danger of the victory of Lord Halsbury's men had come home to him. In a House feverish with excitement, he proclaimed the fact that he would vote with the Government. Up rose Lord Selborne—a Halsbury adherent and a rival with Lord Curzon for the reversion of the Conservative leadership in the House. His voice was hoarse with feeling; and he flung out his hand to Lord Rosebery with denouncing gesture. Were their Lordships going to follow the advice they had just got, or were they going to follow the advice given by the noble Earl, as recently as May 29th, when he said he could see no use in prolonging the House as a useless sham. The anger of Lord Selborne upon what he considered as an act of desertion was fiercely acclaimed by the Stalwarts. Lord Selborne's outburst lasted but a minute or two, and was finished at twenty minutes to eleven, and the cheers of the Stalwarts died away as the Lord Chancellor rose this time really to put the question. The House was very silent as he said, slowly, distinctly, loudly: "The question is that this House do not insist on the said amendment." "Content" and "Not content" rang out in opposing choruses. A division was ordered, and the Chamber echoed the cry, "Strangers, withdraw." Lord Lansdowne's followers began to leave the House—a few of

them squeezing in among the crowd of privy councillors behind the rail in front of the Throne, in order to watch the proceedings. After the abstaining Conservatives had been eliminated, the House began to divide itself into the two camps—Government supporters on the one side, the adherents of Lord Halsbury on the other. From the galleries the two parties seemed to be almost equally numbered. More Bishops were with the Government than had been expected, but on the other hand the Back Bench undeclared Peers had rallied to the side of Lord Halsbury in surprising force. Even in this last few minutes it was impossible to tell who was going to win.

Both sections passed out, and when the Chamber was entirely clear, the tellers stationed themselves at the respective entrances by which the voting Peers were to enter, and where they were to be counted. The Government men were to come in near the Bar, and the Stalwarts by the door on the left of the Throne on the other side of the House. The incoming of the two single files began almost at the same time.

Those of us who were in the gallery over the Bar could not count the Government men as they entered the House; but we could count the Stalwarts quite easily as they came in past the tellers, one by one. "Ten," "twenty," "thirty," "forty," "fifty." Where were the Parliamentary pundits who scoffed at Lord Halsbury's Peers numbering more than forty? "Sixty," "seventy," "eighty," and still no cessation. Supporters of the Government were entering at the other end of the House at about an equal rate. Which line would break first? The watching privy councillors and Peeresses were here and there open-mouthed with anxiety. Everywhere was

strictest silence; save for the regular monotones of the tellers. Where I was placed it was only possible to hear the Stalwarts' figures. They mounted with maddening deliberation and the inevitability of fate. "Ninety," "one hundred," "one hundred and ten." Surely, surely they could not now be beaten; and Lord Lansdowne was a broken man, and within forty-eight hours there would be 500 new peers in the House of Lords. The silent excitement of all the watchers was something which comes to Parliamentarians but once in a generation.

Then it became apparent to us that the two streams were not exactly contemporaneous, and that therefore, should the margin be very narrow, we must not depend on the stoppage of one stream before the other as evidence of defeat. From the time the Stalwarts had totalled 100 every single addition to their numbers was watched with a heart-beat. Earlier in the evening any politician who had been told that Lord Halsbury's followers would reach 100 would immediately have said that victory was in their grasp, that in the most favourable circumstances the Government could not raise their figures so high. All the prophets were mistaken. The strength of feeling aroused through the debate in the evening had brought into play thoughts and emotions not reckoned with, and a good many who had not intended to vote made their way into the division lobbies. The Stalwarts totalled 114. We could not be sure that the Government's supporters had reached that figure. The red benches were by this time sprinkled with the re-entered Peers. Lord Morley, his austere placidity gone for the occasion, was leaning forward on the Front Bench, peering beneath the gallery to get the first intimation of

the Government total. Suddenly an electric murmur ran through the ranks of the Liberal Peers. We knew instantly that 115 peers had voted with the Government; and that the Stalwarts were defeated.

A minute or so later a whip came hurrying up the floor and whispered the figures to Lord Morley, and immediately afterwards Lord Herschell, one of the Government tellers; took up to the Lord Chancellor on the Woolsack a piece of paper on which was written the result of the division. Lord Loreburn read out the figures as follows :—

For the Government motion	..	..	131
Against	..	..	114

Liberal Lords raised a cheer (moderate in tone and highly respectable compared with the demonstration which a similar occasion would have raised in the Commons); one or two of the Stalwarts hissed. Five minutes later the House was adjourned, and Peers Liberal and Conservative, “die-hards” and “scuttlers,” were making their way to the lobbies talking of the excitements of the night.

The surprising strength of the Government in the division was due to the fact that they were joined by several Bishops and by many independent Conservatives. The varying shades of political opinion make it a little difficult to classify a few of those who voted for the Bill, but; according to the *Times*, the Unionist Peers numbered thirty-seven; thirteen Bishops voted on the same side. This leaves a residue of eighty-one Liberal Lords.

Great was the commotion at the result of the division; and many hard words were hurled at the independent Conservatives who voted for the Bill. This passage from

the *Saturday Review* strikes the note. "The shock throughout the party, especially to our working men Unionists, of this runaway in the Lords, including the treachery of the thirty Unionist Peers, is too great not to be felt in consequences long after. The one set-off to Thursday's bad business is that it means a new start. If the doctors of finesse who have so long played with the party felt that in Thursday's defeat the Halsbury brigade and its ideas have gone down finally, they will soon find out their mistake. This is a beginning, not an end. This loose association of Unionists for a particular immediate end will now harden into a permanent organisation."

CHAPTER XXII

THE NEW EPOCH

THE end was near. On August 18th, the royal assent was given, and the Parliament Bill became the Parliament Act, and on the statute book was the measure which would establish a new Parliamentary era. A measure as fundamental in its changes as the Reform Act itself, it was in some degree a continuation of that legislation, setting free pent-up streams of political activity which must necessarily have increasing effect in coming generations over all the land. It was not to be expected that a great change of this kind would be without some undesirable results, but the political genius of the British people might well be trusted to turn to account the modified conditions of Parliamentary Government in that onward movement which fills the vision of all great leaders, and is accepted as inevitable by all parties.

I have hitherto been content to state the facts as they appeared to me, and have refrained from prophecy as to the future, but as one who was present at the fight from start to finish, witnessed the spirit which was engendered, the forces brought into play and the emotions aroused, I might perhaps express the opinion that the hopes of the New Liberals on the one hand and the fears of the Conservatives on the other were unduly strong as regards the

immediate future under the Bill. The play of influences, complex and intertwined, will, I am convinced, prevent the measure having its full effect for a considerable period. Nevertheless, after that intervening period, the Parliament Act must make a profound difference in our national life, widening the avenues for change, making the House of Commons more immediately responsive to the feelings of the common people, and generally quickening the wheels of the Parliamentary machine. There may be legislative spasms of indiscretion under the new conditions, but I think the innate Conservatism of the British people will quickly check progress which is unauthorised by the spirit of the times ; and though the Parliament Act will expedite reforms which are desired by the majority of the electorate, it will check those reforms desired only by a minority. Curious as it may seem, the Parliament Act will undoubtedly for a period strengthen Conservatism in this country ; and undoubtedly, within the next decade, there will be furious lamentations by many of the New Liberals over the disappointing results of the Act from the progressive point of view. Some of the enthusiasts looking forward to the rich fruits of Radical legislation in the few years immediately ahead, will, I believe, experience disappointments ; but it is certain that afterwards, whatever changes may or may not have been made in the composition of the House of Lords in the mean time, the Parliament Act will have a great part in establishing a new phase of legislation for this country.

Directly the Parliament Bill became law the New Liberals turned their eyes to the programme which has been their joy and inspiration for a generation. The first thing on the list was Home Rule for Ireland—which it

was hoped would be passed by 1914. In the same year the disestablishment of the Church of England in Wales was anticipated. A Plural Voting Bill allowing men whether rich or poor but one vote each was a project dear to the hearts of the New Liberals ; and a reform of the licensing laws (defeated a few years before by the Lords) again began to take shape in the dreams of temperance advocates. Undoubtedly the passing of the Parliament Bill quickened the ambitions of the New Liberals. They saw at last the fructification of those desires, some of which had their roots in the labours and visions of the Chartists. They saw the much-talked-of "equality of opportunity" coming nearer for all, saw spreading education uplifting coming generations, saw slum squalor disappearing as though by some quiet magic, saw millions of handworkers previously crushed by heavy hours with their burdens lightened, saw rural life so changed economically as to be an object of desire instead of aversion by labouring men. They saw all these things and many others in the light of the Parliament Act. They did not perhaps take into account the slowness of most changes in this country, and forgot the complexity of interests always assailed by a reformed condition of things. Some of their dreams, it is safe to say, will eventually come to pass. But millenniums are not achieved by a stroke of the pen ; and political history shows us that general elections are much to be feared by Ministerialists after a period of activity by a reforming Government. There comes a lull in the mood of the nation. When that lull has come and gone, then, and not till then, will there be the completest trial and perhaps the justification of the Liberal Government's great experiment of 1911.

APPENDIX

PARLIAMENT ACT, 1911.

An Act to make provision with respect to the powers of the House of Lords in relation to those of the House of Commons, and to limit the duration of Parliament.

[18th August, 1911.]

WHEREAS it is expedient that provision should be made for regulating the relations between the two Houses of Parliament :

And whereas it is intended to substitute for the House of Lords as it at present exists a Second Chamber constituted on a popular instead of hereditary basis, but such substitution cannot be immediately brought into operation :

And whereas provision will require hereafter to be made by Parliament in a measure effecting such substitution for limiting and defining the powers of the new Second Chamber, but it is expedient to make such provision as in this Act appears for restricting the existing powers of the House of Lords :

Be it therefore enacted by the King's most Excellent Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Lords Spiritual and Temporal, and Commons, in this present Parliament assembled, and by the authority of the same, as follows :—

1—(1) If a Money Bill, having been passed by the House of Commons, and sent up to the House of Lords at least one

month before the end of the session, is not passed by the House of Lords without amendment within one month after it is so sent up to that House, the Bill shall, unless the House of Commons direct to the contrary, be presented to His Majesty and become an Act of Parliament on the Royal Assent being signified, notwithstanding that the House of Lords have not consented to the Bill.

- (2) A Money Bill means a Public Bill which in the opinion of the Speaker of the House of Commons contains only provisions dealing with all or any of the following subjects, namely, the imposition, repeal, remission, alteration, or regulation of taxation; the imposition for the payment of debt or other financial purposes of charges on the Consolidated Fund, or on money provided by Parliament, or the variation or repeal of any such charges; supply; the appropriation, receipt, custody, issue or audit of accounts of public money; the raising or guarantee of any loan or the repayment thereof; or subordinate matters incidental to those subjects or any of them. In this subsection the expressions "taxation," "public money," and "loan" respectively do not include any taxation, money, or loan raised by local authorities or bodies for local purposes.
 - (3) There shall be endorsed on every Money Bill when it is sent up to the House of Lords and when it is presented to His Majesty for assent the certificate of the Speaker of the House of Commons signed by him that it is a Money Bill. Before giving his certificate, the Speaker shall consult, if practicable, two members to be appointed from the Chairmen's Panel at the beginning of each Session by the Committee of Selection.
- 2—(1) If any Public Bill (other than a Money Bill or a Bill containing any provision to extend the maximum duration of Parliament beyond five years) is passed by the House of Commons in three successive sessions (whether of the same Parliament or not), and, having been sent

up to the House of Lords at least one month before the end of the session, is rejected by the House of Lords in each of those sessions, that Bill shall, on its rejection for the third time by the House of Lords, unless the House of Commons direct to the contrary, be presented to His Majesty and become an Act of Parliament on the Royal Assent being signified thereto, notwithstanding that the House of Lords have not consented to the Bill : Provided that this provision shall not take effect unless two years have elapsed between the date of the second reading in the first of those sessions of the Bill in the House of Commons and the date on which it passes the House of Commons in the third of those sessions.

- (2) When a Bill is presented to His Majesty for assent in pursuance of the provisions of this section, there shall be endorsed on the Bill the certificate of the Speaker of the House of Commons signed by him that the provisions of this section have been duly complied with.
- (3) A Bill shall be deemed to be rejected by the House of Lords if it is not passed by the House of Lords either without amendment or with such amendments only as may be agreed to by both Houses.
- (4) A Bill shall be deemed to be the same Bill as a former Bill sent up to the House of Lords in the preceding session if, when it is sent up to the House of Lords, it is identical with the former Bill or contains only such alterations as are certified by the Speaker of the House of Commons to be necessary owing to the time which has elapsed since the date of the former Bill, or to represent any amendments which have been made by the House of Lords in the former Bill in the preceding session, and any amendments which are certified by the Speaker to have been made by the House of Lords in the third session and agreed to by the House of Commons shall be inserted in the Bill as presented for Royal Assent in pursuance of this section :

Provided that the House of Commons may, if they think fit, on the passage of such a Bill through the House in the second or third session, suggest any further amendments without inserting the amendments in the Bill, and any such suggested amendments shall be considered by the House of Lords, and, if agreed to by that House, shall be treated as amendments made by the House of Lords and agreed to by the House of Commons; but the exercise of this power by the House of Commons shall not affect the operation of this section in the event of the Bill being rejected by the House of Lords.

3 Any certificate of the Speaker of the House of Commons given under this Act shall be conclusive for all purposes, and shall not be questioned in any court of law.

4—(1) In every Bill presented to His Majesty under the preceding provisions of this Act, the words of enactment shall be as follows, that is to say :—

“ Be it enacted by the King’s most Excellent Majesty, by and with the advice and consent of the Commons in this present Parliament assembled, in accordance with the provisions of the Parliament Act, 1911, and by authority of the same, as follows.”

(2) Any alteration of a Bill necessary to give effect to this section shall not be deemed to be an amendment of the Bill.

5 In this Act the expression “ Public Bill ” does not include any Bill for confirming a Provisional Order.

6 Nothing in this Act shall diminish or qualify the existing rights and privileges of the House of Commons.

7 Five years shall be substituted for seven years as the time fixed for the maximum duration of Parliament under the Septennial Act, 1715.

8 This Act may be cited as the Parliament Act, 1911.

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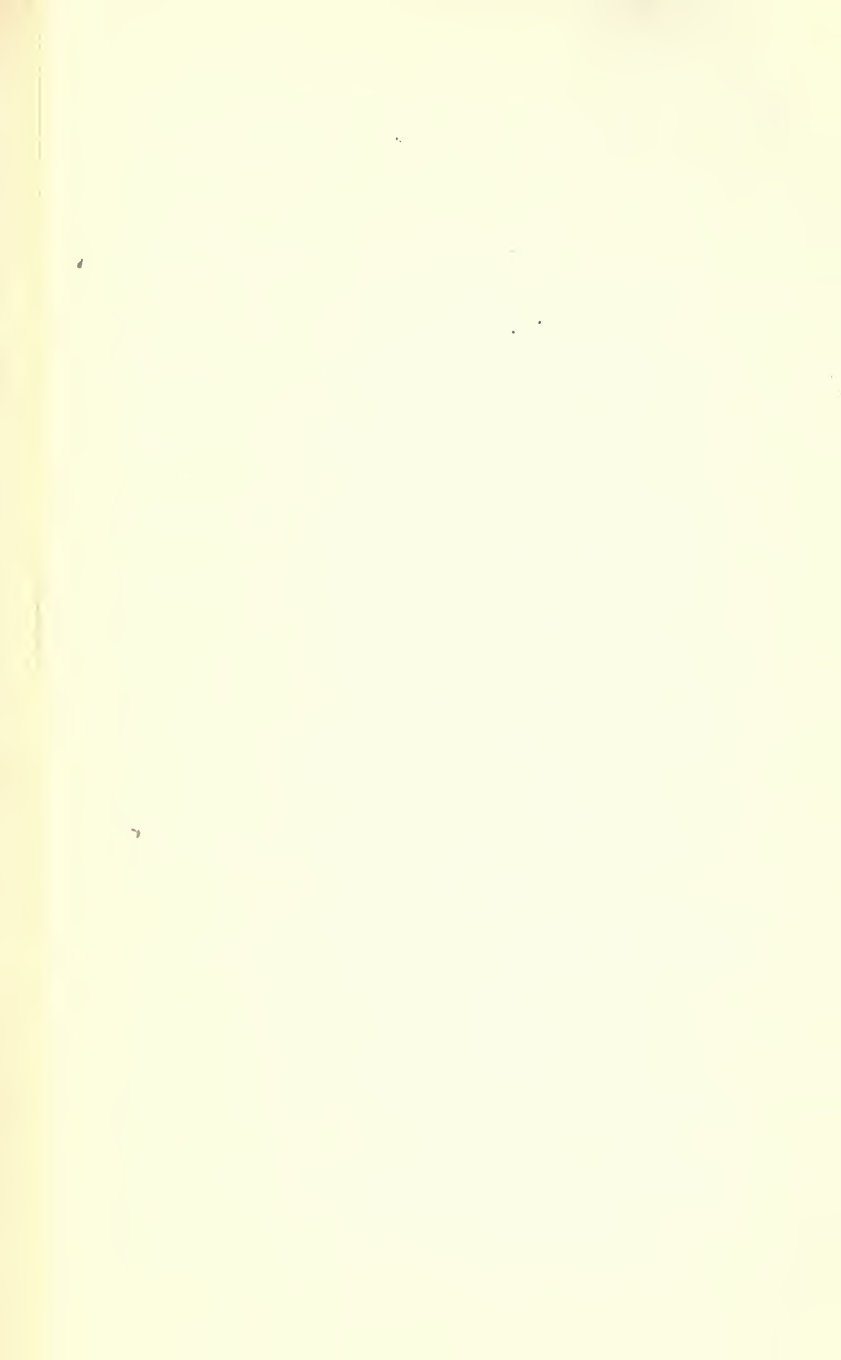
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